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OR,

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UPSIDE DOWN;

OR,

WILL AND WORK.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK-EDGED LETTER.

"A-SHOO! a-shoo! Start your boots! Scat, scamper! Clear out, or I'll wring the necks of every one of you. Conscience sake, if I ever see sech torments."

Mrs. Down was trying to clear the chickens out of the sitting-room. She flapped her apron, and waved her arms, and scolded herself out of breath; but for one yellow leg she piloted safely through the door, half a dozen rushed past her, and ensconced

themselves under the chintz-covered lounge, up the wide-mouthed chimney-place, and in divers other quarters, where experience had taught them they were safe from her attacks.

Finally, Mrs. Down reseated herself, and fell to fanning her heated face with a torn book-cover.

"I declare," panted she, "I no more get comfortably settled for my afternoon nap, than them pesky critters fall to fightin'. It all comes of Sol's trainin' 'em to it; an' I'll jest put a stop to that fun. I might as well do it one time as another."

Here is Mrs. Down's portrait: Fat, lazy, and good-natured — you could see that with a glance; an undecided mouth, and shallow blue eyes; a general shiftlessness pervading her whole arrangement, or rather derangement, for her light, fady hair was untidily lumped up with a broken comb, and her soiled dress parted company both at throat and waist; her apron boasted one white string and one black one; her feet

were slipshod; and though she had the frame and build of a man, you could not have been with her half an hour before you discovered her insignificance. An intelligent baby could have got the upperhand of her. Even the chickens, roosting now, in open defiance, upon the chair-backs and window-frames, felt themselves her masters.

"Here! ma, marm, Pug's got a letter."

Into the room, with these words, three shock-headed boys launched themselves. They swooped at the chickens, that ducked and dived; and amidst the flutter and commotion, and while Mrs. Down was saying, mildly, "Now, boys, don't be cutting up all the time," a tall, overgrown girl made her appearance.

"Have you got a letter, Becky?" asked her mother of her, eagerly.

"Tighter 'n a nutshell she is about it, too," cried one of the boys. "She wouldn't give one of us fellers a squint at it."

"There's a black streak all round it, mother," said the girl, paying no attention

to her brother, "and the postman said somebody must be dead."

"Law, child! what a scare you've given me!" said Mrs. Down, the full-blown redness of her face fading to an ashy white.

She held up the letter, which Becky had laid in her lap. It was deeply edged with black.

"Nobody sends us letters but your uncle Jerry, and this isn't his writing," she murmured, as she tremblingly broke the seal.

The three boys, awed for the moment into decorum, stood watching her in gaping silence..

All at once she crumpled the sheet of note-paper in her hands, and catching her apron to her eyes, sobbed and groaned in the wildest and most distressed manner.

"O, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!" she cried between her sobs.

She rocked herself to and fro; she wrung her hands;. her loosely-held hair broke from its fastenings, and streamed over her shoulders One would think she had gone crazy.

"What is it, mother?" whispered Becky, creeping close to her side. "Don't take on so."

Her mother looked up at her, and then at the three boys. "Poor lambs," said she, "what will become of you now, the Lord only knows."

Then she burst again into her loud wailing and weeping.

"Is uncle Jerry—dead," whispered Becky, a second time, hesitating over the last word.

Her mother nodded her head. "It's a death-blow to me," she said, brokenly. "I feel I shall not live through it. The last stay has been taken away from us. We must starve now, or go to the almshouse."

"O, no," said Becky; and she spoke firmly, and even cheerfully. "It can't be so bad as that."

"Read the letter. *She* wrote it. She always did have a spite against us."

Becky rescued the crumpled sheet from amongst the tear-bedewed apron-folds, and smoothing it out carefully, carried it to the

window, and commenced to spell it out, the boys, meanwhile, looking over her shoulder.

"MADAM" (so the letter ran):—

"Your brother died this morning, very suddenly, of heart disease. I enclose you a check for fifty dollars, which will provide you with mourning, and which will also defray your expenses here and back, should you wish to attend the funeral, which will take place on Thursday.

"This is the last money you need expect from me. Your brother left no will, and of course you have no claims on his family. The many sorrowful preparations which the sudden death of my late lamented husband enjoins upon me, will prevent my writing at further length.

"If you come on, I will take that time to help you decide as to your future course. If not, I will write.

"LOUISA BIDDLES."

A rather hard, cold letter for one woman, and she a widow of a few hours, to write to

another, that other being the only sister of her dead husband.

But Mrs. Louisa Biddles was a hard, cold, fashionable woman.

A thorn in her side had the shiftlessness of her sister-in-law always been to her — a bone of contention ever between her and her husband.

"Why do you support her in lazy idleness?" she had urged again and again. "Some of the children are old enough to work. It is a shame that she, strong, healthy, and robust, cannot do something for herself. There is no pleasure in such charity, for with it all — enough, in that out-of-the-way place, for your sister to keep her whole family in comfort — the house looks worse than an Irish cabin, and the children are as tattered and torn as beggars."

Folks said that Jeremiah Biddles, whose name was great on change, was "hen-pecked" at home.

However this might be, in this one instance he always held his ground.

"There is no use in talking, Louisa," he would say, mildly: he was always mild and pleasant-spoken. "She is the only sister I have; I shall not dictate to her, and I shall support her as long as I live."

But now he was dead. Like a stroke of lightning that fells the sturdy oak, so suddenly had death come. Well might his sister cry that her "last stay" was gone; for in his death she had lost all.

For eight years — ever since the death of her own husband — he had given to her ungrudgingly.

It is not to be wondered at, that even with the first shock of his death, — and she had loved him dearly and truly, — it is not to be wondered at that her grief was mixed with terror at this sudden downfall of her worldly prosperity.

Becky's eyes were filled with tears when she had finished the letter. She had never seen her uncle very much, it is true; but during his short visits amongst them, she had been deeply impressed with his kind

ways and words. She was old enough to understand, too, the debt of gratitude they owed him.

The boys also looked awe-struck and solemn.

Becky went softly up to her mother, and put her arms round her neck. "Don't cry so hard," said she; "you will make yourself sick. You will not be able to go to the funeral."

Her mother was still sobbing desperately.

"Funeral!" echoed she. "I will not go. Jerry's wife will only insult me. Pack up the clothes: we might as well start for the almshouse now. O, Jerry! It can't be that you are dead and gone. Yes, child, I must see him buried. I must look on his dear, kind face once more. I will go to the funeral."

"Well, mother, you must start by Wednesday morning sure, and to-day is Monday. You have got your mourning to buy, and your dress to make, and you must carry the check to the bank, and—"

"O, child!" clasping Becky convulsively. "Don't! I can't bear it. I can never get through with it. Hadn't I better stay at home, after all?"

"No, indeed! Do not worry. I will manage it for you. First I will run down to Miss Riggs, and get her to come over, the first thing in the morning."

"Well," sighed her mother, resignedly.

But before Becky had gone two steps, she called out, "Don't leave me," and went into hysterics.

"Hadn't you better have a cup of tea?" asked Becky, when her mother had partially calmed down.

"And I'll go to bed. Perhaps, if I can sleep a little, I'll get rid of this swimming in my head. I ain't fit for nothin' now."

Becky waited long enough to tuck her mother carefully between the sheets, and to administer the steaming cup of tea, and then started the second time for Miss Riggs.

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY.

REBECCA DOWN, commonly known as *Becky*, and called, sometimes more familiarly still, by the elegant and fanciful name of *Pug*, by her scapegrace brothers, was an odd, queer child.

"And she always was an odd stick," — so her mother said, — "from the very beginning."

Even when she was a little mite of a baby, she would never stay "put."

However securely she might be tied into her chair, or propped among her pillows, no sooner was she left alone than all her arrangements were topsy-turvy, and herself upside down.

These childish misdemeanors pleased her father mightily. He called her his little

"Upside Down," and prophesied great things from these early exhibitions of her will and activity.

"Perhaps," said his wife, "if you had her to shake up and set to rights fifty times a minute, you wouldn't be quite so glib over it. A baby that'll lay, and set, and amuse itself by sucking its thumb, — that's the kind of baby for me."

The other children, Solomon, Jacob, and David — it was their father's idea to give them all scriptural names — were babies after Mrs. Down's own heart. They were fat and easy, like herself, scarcely ever worried, never cried, and were obliging enough to suck their thumbs, hours at a time, in the very happiest frame of mind.

As a matter of course, seeing they were too lazy to stretch themselves, they grew sidewise more than lengthwise, or grew broad and not tall; while little Upside Down, from her very uneasiness (so it would seem), shot up like a young sapling. And now, at twelve years, she stood head and

shoulders above Solomon, who was two years her senior.

But while I have been giving you this short family sketch, Becky has cut across the fields, and has reached the little white-painted, gambrel-roofed cottage which Miss Riggs makes her home. Everything here is as neat as a pin. The cottage looks as though painted yesterday; the gravel-walk is newly raked; the bright-colored autumn flowers within the smooth-clipped box-borders are so very fresh and wide awake that you are sure they must be just blown out.

There is a trim little door-plate on the door, that makes you wink. Becky can see her face in it. "R. Riggs" is inscribed thereon.

Above the door, whose projecting porch is covered with pots of flowers and boxes of mignonette, almost buried in this huge nosegay of sweets, hangs a very blue little sign, with white letters standing out from it like raised worsted work, which say, very plainly and boldly, "Miss Riggs, Mantua-maker."

The extra order and neatness impress Becky just as they have a hundred times before, and she stoops to retie her shoes, and pull her stockings up tighter. She arranges her hat in the mirror of a door-plate.

Then she knocks with her knuckles (there is no bell) upon the door.

She hears a door inside open. "Me do, mamma," says a child's voice; and little feet come, patter, patter, and after some fumbling, the knob is turned, and the door swung wide, by Baby Riggs.

"Why, Betty Down, is 'at 'ou? Mamma, it's Betty Down," cried Baby, who, being but three years old, could not be expected to talk plain.

"Is auntie at home?" asked Becky.

"Es; do 'ight up 'tair," said Baby, as if she were used to the sentence, and smiling at Becky a bushelful.

Becky walks along towards the stairs; midway she comes upon the cosiest little sitting-room in the world, though the carpet

is a home-made rag one, and the chairs are straw-bottomed. There is a lady sitting in a low rocking-chair, sewing.

"How do you do, Becky?" she asks, lifting her eyes. "How is your mother?"

"O, Mrs. Riggs!" answered Becky, standing still in the open doorway; "uncle Jerry is dead!"

"Mercy!" cried Mrs. Riggs, raising both hands; "you don't mean it? Going into mourning?"

"Mother is. That's what I come to see about."

Then, not waiting for another word, she went up to Miss Riggs's room.

And a very sunshiny place Miss Riggs's room was, with a golden-backed canary twittering in a gayly-painted cage, made with a cupola on top, and a bay-window on one side, and the smell of flowers, and the crimson-cushioned ottomans, with worsted dogs worked in the centres, and the wonderful tidies, on the sofa-arms, done in shell-work.

As to Miss Riggs herself, the mistress of this paradise (so Becky looked upon it), she was a frail, shadowy little woman; her skin was fair and delicate as a child's; the ringlets which shaded her face, three on each side, were thin as spun glass, and her waist — why, you could have spanned it with your two hands; she was near-sighted, and wore spectacles.

"Is it you?" she said, at sight of Becky. "You don't say there's another new dress to be cut so soon as this?"

Miss Riggs talked so much to her canary that her voice had a bird-like twitter to it, very pleasant and cheerful.

"O, Miss Riggs!" said Becky, exactly the same way that she had said down stairs, "O, Mrs. Riggs!" "uncle Jerry is dead!"

"Why, why, why!" exclaimed the little woman, in a sorrowful chirp; "but that is dreadful! Is there anything I can do for you? Mourning to make, I suppose. O, yes; very sad. When did you hear of it? Something sudden?"

"We had a letter only just a little while ago, and I came right up to see if you could come over to-morrow. The funeral is Thursday."

"Dear, dear; little enough time to make a dress — isn't it? Just one day. But I can do it. What is the stuff?"

"She hasn't bought it yet, and she's sick in bed."

"So!" exclaimed Miss Riggs, with the greatest compassion; "I'll put on my bonnet this minute, and run over. There's a very nice piece of bombazet down at the store; perhaps she'd like me to get it for her. I'm sure there's nothing but I should be willing to do to oblige, in such a case."

By the time she was done talking, she was fully equipped for her walk. On the way, she was very kind and full of sympathy.

Becky found her mother more calm and composed than she had expected she would be.

She still cried at intervals, but in a softer

and more rational manner. She showed Miss Riggs the letter.

"Only to think of it!" cried Miss Riggs. "Some folks' hearts are harder than a nether millstone's; and rolling in gold, as you may say, too."

"Fifty dollars," said Mrs. Down, piteously, "between me and starvation. And there's the journey on and back, and the mourning, and all. I don't know as I shall ever get out of my bed again."

"Dear heart, you musn't talk so," chirruped Miss Riggs. "There's the children to live for. Besides, fifty dollars will go a great ways. I have a great knack of getting things cheap, and if you say so, I'll try my hand at shopping for you."

"I wish you would," answered Mrs. Down, helplessly. "You can charge it, you know, till I get the check cashed."

"I suppose, besides a dress, you want a bonnet. Crape would be the right thing, and a crape veil; but then that costs something, and we have got to be so economical."

"I have got a crape veil. I had it when my husband died. It's as good as new."

"Just the thing, then. And we'll rip the border off your black shawl, and bind it with ribbon."

Mrs. Down assented to everything; and after agreeing to be round bright and early in the morning, little Miss Riggs departed on her errands of mercy.

When she got home to the wee nest of a cottage, she said to Mrs. Riggs, — and it is time to make it publicly known that Mrs. Riggs is Miss Riggs's sister, inasmuch as she was Miss Riggs's brother's wife, — as I was saying, she said to Mrs. Riggs, —

"I do pity those poor Downs. They are not the sort to make their own way in the world;" and then she told off Mrs. Louisa Biddle's letter word for word, for this slim little body had a wonderful memory.

"However," she added, showing the bombazet which she had bargained like a Jew for, "I got this at half price almost, and the bonnet I made them put at a lower figure.

As for what I do, I shan't take a cent. We have all made money enough out of the Down family, in times past, not to be hard upon them now."

"You will lose *your* best customer," said her sister.

"I do not mind that," cried Miss Riggs, earnestly; "but I *do* pity Mrs. Down from the bottom of my heart."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE WAY.

TUESDAY came and went, and at its close, Mrs. Down's bombazet was done, and hung in sombre folds over the back of a chair in the "best room," and her crape bonnet and veil lay on the centre-table, beside her shawl, neatly folded and bound with a broad, black ribbon.

There was also an entire suit of mourning for Becky; for, at the eleventh hour, her mother had broken down completely with the thought of the long, lonely journey before her.

"I can't go through with it," she declared. "I shall die before I get there, and I shall never live to come back."

"There, there," said Miss Riggs, whose tiny fingers were flying like magic; "it's a

great undertaking, I know; but it won't do to give way now. You must keep up your courage."

"But I haven't got any courage to keep up," responded Mrs. Down, feebly. "I never did have any. It ought not to be expected of me at this late day."

"O, dear! I do wish I could go and take care of you myself," exclaimed the little mantua-maker, who, beside Mrs. Down, looked more like a midget than ever.

"Yes; if I could only have some one with me, I think I could get along."

"Let me go, mother," exclaimed Becky, looking up from her work; for Miss Riggs had pressed her into the service, and she was pulling out bastings most dexterously,

"You?" Mrs. Down and Miss Riggs both exclaimed at once; for this was a new idea to them.

"Why not?" asked Miss Riggs.

"Why not?" echoed poor, helpless Mrs. Down, brightening up a little.

"All the trouble is the money," said Miss

Riggs; "but then she can go half price. She is only twelve, you know; and your mourning has cost so little. Yes, I should take her, if I were you. But now what will Becky wear? That is the next question."

"I've got a black zouave, only it's trimmed with red braid," said Becky.

"We can rip that off; and I have got a black cape you can wear outside, and if you've a piece of black ribbon in the house, I can put it on your hat in no time. Now, all that is wanted is a black skirt."

And even this last was bought, and cut, and made, and laid in the "best room," ready for the morning, before Miss Riggs went home.

"It is the hardest day's work I ever did in my life," she said to her sister; "but I don't begrudge it."

Wednesday morning! And Becky got up and dressed herself, feeling very sad and forlorn. She looked in the glass, and hardly knew herself.

Her mother, too, seemed like a stranger

to her, with her pale, tear-stained face, and her dead black dress and heavy veil.

Breakfast was eaten in a hurried silence, only broken by a few hysterical sobs from Mrs. Down. The three boys could not swallow a mouthful. Even their light, careless hearts grew heavy at sight of the black dresses and the mournful faces of their mother and Becky. They followed to the door, very shy and ill at ease.

"Be good boys," said their mother; "take the beans out of soak, and get them on boiling in good time;" and she had to swallow several sobs before she got through the sentence.

"Solomon, don't let Dave wash the dishes," said Becky, prudently.

"We shall be back Friday night if our lives are spared us," were their mother's parting words.

Then the boys stood in the doorway, and watched the two black figures, and the small black hand-satchel, down the road.

And besides these three pairs of eyes,

there were many another pair, that, from behind window-curtains and blinds, peeped curiously at Becky and her mother. Every little farm-house and cottage on the way had some one on the lookout; for the news that the "rich Jeremiah Biddles" was dead had made a great commotion in the quiet country town; and as every one knew everybody else's business, the whole community knew that Mrs. Down had a bombazet and a crape bonnet, and was going to her brother's funeral in the early morning train.

The journey was accomplished without accident; and though Mrs. Down from time to time remarked that she was "sure there would be a smash-up," nothing of the kind happened. It was lucky that Becky had accompanied her; for though the child had never been in the cars before in her life, she kept her wits about her, and held on to her mother when she half rose with a smothered scream, which, every time the car-whistle sounded, she invariably did.

They did not leave the cars once through

the day. They had ginger-snaps and seed-cakes in the satchel, on which they lunched at noon-time, and late in the afternoon they reached the city, and arrived at their journey's end.

In the depot, however, new difficulties beset them. They were taken up, and carried along with the rush, quite helpless. The shouting, the stamping, the banging of trunks and boxes, stunned and bewildered them. Becky held tight to her mother's hand. Finally they came to a clearer space, where they drew a little to one side, and stopped to take breath.

"I really thought, Becky," panted her mother, whose face was like a full-blown peony, "that the end of all things had come."

And now the hack and cab-men gobbled them up. If they were surprised and confounded before, they were a thousand times more so now. As they backed against the wall, the bawling creatures surrounded them in a semicircle, vociferating, gesticulating,

and mixing up the Queen's English into a terrible hodge-podge. "'Ave a 'ack, hack, hack, 'ack, 'ack, 'ack?" they began in a chorus.

Then, above the general tumult, a few of the strongest-lunged ones could be heard shouting, "King's Hot'l!" "Vashin'ton House!" "h'Owl's 'ill!" "Quane Strate, me honey!"

Finally, one bolder than the rest seized Mrs. Down by the shoulder, and by main force dragged her away.

"Hurry up, mum," said he, in her ear; "yer last chance. Going right up your way. No baggage? Here you are, then;" and never knowing how they got there, Mrs. Down and Becky found themselves outside the depot, on the sidewalk.

"Here you are," said the hack-driver again, letting down the steps of a small cab, which made one in a long row of carriages and carts which were backed up against the curbstone.

The driver held the cab-door open. "Step right in, mum," said he.

"O, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Down. "Don't ask me; I really can't do it."

No wonder she was afraid to trust herself to the cab, which looked frail beside her, and to which was attached an anatomical horse, with weak-looking knees, and not enough of a tail to brush even a fly off with.

A cab — some of my readers may never have seen one — is at best but a tiltish thing, having two wheels and one seat, into which a couple of medium-sized persons *can* be squeezed without injury. A couple thus packed away would put you in mind of herrings in a box.

The idea of Mrs. Down crowding into the one before her was ridiculous in the extreme. Why, standing on the sidewalk, she actually towered above it. The cabman, however, did not see the joke.

"Come 'long, ef yer a-comin'," he said; gruffly; "I can't stand a-chaffin' here all day."

"I'm sure I would if I dared. Mercy

me! I wouldn't jam myself through that door for a farm."

The driver slammed the door to, and went off muttering something, the last word of which was "grass."

"Madam," said a courteous voice, "if you will trust yourself to me, I will find you a carriage."

The owner of the voice was a fine-looking elderly gentleman, who, passing by at the instant of cabby's impudent parting address, had taken in at a glance the bearings of the case.

Under his superintendence, Becky and her mother were speedily placed in a comfortable carriage.

"What address shall I give the coachman?" asked the kind gentleman.

"Jeremiah Biddles, No. 65 Westminster Square," said Mrs. Down.

"Jeremiah Biddles," repeated their stranger friend; "he is, or rather was, an intimate friend of mine. Did you know that he died Monday?"

Mrs. Down nodded her head. "I am his sister," she exclaimed, with a burst of tears; and then the carriage drove away.

And now Becky began wondering what her aunt Biddles would say, and how she would look. Some years before, she had come up with uncle Jerry when he paid his sister one of his flying visits, and Becky had a very clear recollection of her grand airs, and her dry, disagreeable voice. Her cousins she had never seen. One was named Caroline, and the other Gertrude. Caroline was her age. Gertrude was a few years younger. Becky wondered what *they* would be like.

In the midst of her wondering, the carriage stopped.

"This is 65," said the driver, as he stood ready to help out his passengers. "Biddles on the door."

Becky and her mother mounted the high flight of marble steps to the heavily-carved vestibule door. Long ends of crape floated from the silver door-knob; and glancing up

at the house, which was of brown stone, six stories high, Mrs. Down hesitatingly pulled the bell.

A servant, in a sort of livery of dark-blue cloth, with plush bands (with a piece of crape tied about his left arm, just above the elbow), answered her ring."

"Is Mrs. Biddles in, sir?" asked Mrs. Down, who wondered who this elegantly-dressed person was.

The man stared. "Mrs. Biddles is not at home to any callers," said he, preparing to shut the door.

"But — but — I'm Jerry's — I'm Mr. Biddles's sister."

"I beg your pardon," said the man, changing his manner entirely. "I will inform my mistress that you are here."

He ushered them through a richly-carpeted hall, into a small reception-room, furnished in purple velvet. The purple draperies at the windows were lined with white satin, and were white-fringed and tasselled.

Becky and her mother just lighted upon the edge of a purple velvet *tête-à-tête*. Their sumptuous surroundings almost took away their breath.

In a few minutes there was a rustle of silk, and a tall, proud-looking woman came into the room. She held a handkerchief in her hand, deeply bordered with black.

This was aunt Biddles, uncle Jerry's wife. Becky thought she looked the same as ever, only paler and haughtier.

"You have come, then," she said. "I hardly expected you;" and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"O, Louisa!" burst out Mrs. Down; "it is too dreadful!" and the frail piece of furniture under her shook with her loud grief.

"You make me nervous," said Mrs. Biddles, taking her face out of her handkerchief.

"O, O, O!" screamed Mrs. Down, getting worse and worse; and in spite of all that Becky could do, she finished off with hysterics.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BIDDLES, AUNT AND COUSINS.

THE Biddles family, all that were left of it, were at tea.

The damask table-cloth was snowy white, the glass and silver shone and sparkled, the chandelier was ablaze, and bright tongues of flame leaped through the bars of the glowing grate and reflected themselves cheerily in the polished steel fender.

But the place at the head of the table was empty. It was enough, and more than enough, to blot the dazzle around them into utter darkness, and to turn the warmth of the dancing fire-light into a deadly chill.

Around the table were gathered the mother and her two daughters, Mrs. Down and Becky, while the butler stood behind his mistress's chair, duly mindful of any one's needs.

The thoughts of each were with that cold, still form, that but a few hours before had been carried out of the house and laid away forever from their sight in its last earthly resting-place. For the funeral was over. The indulgent father, the kind husband, the generous brother, had passed away like a dream. Instead of his living presence, a memory remained to them — nothing more.

Erect and tearless, Mrs. Biddles sat in her widow's weeds, facing the master's "vacant chair." Caroline at her right, who inherited her mother's haughty stiffness, was also tearless and composed. But Gertrude, — sweet-faced little Gerty, the father's pet, — her blue eyes were misty, and her small, rosy mouth quivering still.

As for Mrs. Down, she had cried so much that she could cry no more, and, greatly to Mrs. Biddles's relief, had lapsed into a partial numbness, which allowed of her speaking just above a whisper. She gasped too, from time to time. This was all she was capable of.

Nobody partook very heartily of the delicate viands before them.

"John," said Mrs. Biddles, when Mrs. Down refused a second cup of tea and left her toast untasted, "you may go. I will ring when I want you."

The butler, to whom this was addressed, bowed and left the room.

Then Mrs. Biddles turned to her dead husband's sister. "I know it is early to talk of business," she said; "but your going away in the morning leaves me no other chance."

Mrs. Down looked at Becky imploringly.

"It will be best to be alone," continued Mrs. Biddles. "We will wait till the children are gone."

"I had rather Becky would stay," said Mrs. Down, quite alarmed. "I am so dull. I don't know anything about business. She will understand it, though."

"Very well," assented Mrs. Biddles, shortly, motioning to her daughters, who walked away together.

After shutting the door behind them, the two girls went slowly up the stairs. Gertrude nestled up to her sister in a half-frightened kind of way, and put her arm about her.

"Carry," said she, her eyes mistier than ever, "do you think she looks like papa?"

"Who?"

"Cousin Becky."

"No; who says so?"

"Why, Judge Peters! Don't you know he saw them at the depot yesterday, and got them a carriage? And to-day I heard him say to Becky, 'My dear, you are the perfect image of your uncle.'"

"I don't think so," said Caroline. "That awkward, common country girl is no more like our dear, handsome papa than — than nothing at all," and with the tremble in her voice the tears came into her eyes.

"Poor, darling pa," sobbed Gerty, clasping her sister closer.

Meanwhile, down in the dining-room their mother was talking business.

She had drawn her chair to the fire, and was resting her feet on the fender. But the blaze brought no color to her cheek, no light to her eyes. She sat like a frozen statue, and her voice was cold as ice.

"As I wrote you in the letter," she said, "you have no claim upon us. There will be no trouble about the division of the property. One third, by law, goes to me, and there remains a third for each of the children. We shall all have equal shares."

The lady paused and looked straight at Mrs. Down, as if to ask, "Have you anything to say to this?"

But she, poor woman, only wilted the more under Mrs. Biddles's steady stare, and huddled back still farther into her chair.

The icy voice went on: "I suppose you have had expectations. Probably, if there had been a will, some provision would have been made for you. But all that is at an end now. If you had been a prudent woman, you would have laid by a part of the money that has been so lavishly supplied

you. Very likely, however, you have saved nothing."

"Not a cent!" gasped Mrs. Down, her clasped hands falling heavily on the table before her.

"I thought as much," was the response. "I do not wish, however, to be hard upon you. The near relation you bore to my dear husband constrains me to be charitable."

Mrs. Down ventured here on a hopeful glance.

"You may have the farm, for at least this winter, rent free."

A groan broke from her listener. "What shall we do for victuals and clothes?" said she.

"Have you not enough clothes?"

"Yes," spoke up Becky, who was standing beside her mother; "we have plenty of clothes."

"As to the victuals," said Mrs. Biddles, "have you not planted corn, rye, wheat, potatoes, and other vegetables?"

"Good gracious, no! The boys don't like to work out in the briling sun, and it's a good deal of trouble to hire, and a deal handier to buy at the door, for the cart comes round every day in summer, and twice a week in the winter."

"Is it possible you have not harvested anything for winter use?"

"No, nothing."

"You have a pig?" said Mrs. Biddles, in desperation.

"It got through a hole in the fence and run away."

"Well, there is the horse and cow, very unnecessary luxuries, which you can easily dispense with. They will meet with a ready sale."

"What! sell Zeb, that we took an unbroken colt, and have had these fifteen years? And old Brindle, that rubs her nose against us and eats out of our hands?"

This appeal did not seem to touch Mrs. Biddles at all.

After a moment's silence, she said, "You might keep a pin and needle store."

"A store!" exclaimed Mrs. Down, looking as though she were losing her senses.

"Or you could take in plain sewing," went on her sister-in-law, "or keep boarders, or work the farm. Indeed, this last would be the most profitable of all."

"But how can I yoke oxen, and drive the plough, and pitch hay?" asked Mrs. Down, wildly.

"Of course, you will not do these things yourself. You have only to sit in the house and give your orders, and manage."

"It ain't in me. O, Jerry, you never thought I'd come to this;" and the poor woman buried her face in her hands.

"What do you expect of me?" exclaimed Mrs. Biddles, with sudden irritation. "Are you not strong and healthy? Have you not four children old enough to help you? Work is easy if you have the will. I think there is nothing else to say. In my eyes, you are not objects of charity."

"We do not wish to be objects of charity," said Becky, coloring angrily, for this stung her worst of all.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Gerty's brown head was thrust in.

"Can't we come now?" asked she. "It is so lonesome staying by ourselves!"

"Yes," assented her mother; and she and Caroline came in.

Gerty looked questioningly at Becky's flushed face.

"I should like to go to bed," breathed Mrs. Down, feebly.

"I will show you the way," said Gerty; and indeed in that great house, with its numerous landings and corridors, its anterooms and cross-passages, Becky and her mother fully needed a guide.

Gerty led them to their room in silence; but on the threshold she beckoned to her cousin, and drew her back into the entry.

"What is it, Becky?" asked she, coaxingly.

"Nothing," answered Becky, with a hard gulp.

"I know, though," said Gerty. "Caroline told me. Papa made no will, and so you can have none of his money. I wish I could give you some of mine; but Caroline says mamma will keep that till I am grown up. But this" — and as she spoke she thrust something into Becky's hand — "is my very own. Pa gave it to me ever so long ago. Do take it, please. Nobody need know."

"I do not want your money," said Becky, stiffly, tendering back the crisp bank-notes.

"Do take it," pleaded Gerty. "You know you look like pa. Caroline don't think so, but I do, and *he* would want you to have it."

The round tears rolled down over her face as she spoke.

All Becky's stiffness vanished.

"You are not like the rest of 'em," she said. "I liked you from the first, but now

I love you with all my heart;" and she kept the bank-notes.

And thus with one member of the Biddles family an everlasting friendship was cemented.

CHAPTER V.

TOO MANY COOKS SPOIL THE BROTH.

THE stay-at-homes, Solomon, Jacob, and David, conducted the household matters, during the three days they were left alone, in a highly original manner.

But to begin at the beginning. No sooner had they watched the travellers out of sight, over the brow of the hill, than they all scampered to do their mother's last bidding — the taking the beans out of soak, and the getting them on to boil.

In their zeal, Jacob and David, both plunging at the same instant into the dark little pot-closet for the kettle, bumped their heads together with a terrific crack.

David roared out with pain, and Solomon, setting down his pan of beans hastily upon the edge of the kitchen table, rushed to their

assistance, for in their first agony they were unable to move, and still remained crouched on their knees, half in and half out of the little pot-closet.

Solomon dragged them forth into outer daylight again by their heels. The kettle, with considerable racket, came with them, for they each had hold of the handle. Groaning, with their bumped heads in their spare hands, they carried the kettle towards the stove.

Not seeing their way very clearly, they hit against the corner of the table, and away went the pan of beans, with a great spatter of water upon the floor.

Solomon made a rueful face, but he was honest enough to own that he was to blame for this.

"Never mind, boys," said he; "that's my fault. I didn't set the pan on far enough; but nothing's broke!"

"Only our heads," replied Jacob; and then the boys all laughed heartily, and set to work scooping the beans off the floor with their hands, and throwing them into the kettle.

"Hold on!" said Solomon, reaching for the fire-shovel; "this'll take 'em up in no time" — which it did; and as not one of the three objected at all to the coating of soot and ashes which some of the beans, in consequence, put on, nobody outside need sniff at Solomon's very bright idea.

It certainly did save time. And, then, *they* were to eat the beans, not we.

After this job was thus happily disposed of, Solomon swung the kettle to its place, put on the cover with a snap, and then broomed the puddle of water, and the few remaining beans, under the stove.

"What'll we do next?" asked Jacob.

"The dishes," said Solomon; for the table stood in all the disorder the breakfast party had left it in.

There was a platter half full of cold meat. "Kitty, kitty, kitty," cried David; and a great yellow cat, with green eyes, dashed through the window.

"Come, kit," said David, again; and so encouraged, she jumped upon the table,

and, in this elevated position, attacked the meat with great relish.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" all at once sounded desperately through the doorway; and into the kitchen marched an army of grandfatherly roosters and motherly hens, half-grown, greedy-faced chickens, and downy little bantams, just out of the shell. And strutting along on each side, as stately as drum-majors, were two great big turkey gobblers.

"Cluck, cluck! chirp, chirp! peep, peep! gobble, gobble, gobble!" sang the feathered tribe, in its loudest key.

"Go get them some corn," said Solomon, who, being the oldest, was naturally given to ordering about his brothers.

But Jacob and David were aiming at the gobblers' heads with little junks of bread and potatoes that they took from the table.

The turkeys were dancing, the hens and chickens scuffling, the little banties all in a whirl.

Solomon was not proof against this.

"Hit him again," cried he to David, who had just made an extra good stroke; and he plunged into the very thickest of the fun himself.

"There," said Jacob, grabbing the last morsel and taking aim, "the table is cleared, all except the butter."

"Put that in the pantry," ordered Solomon.

"You do it, Dave," ordered Jacob, in his turn.

And David, who unhappily had no younger brother to shift *his* burdens upon, carried off the butter.

"I've forgot the cover," he thought, as he set the dish on the shelf. "I suppose the flies will get into it."

He eyed distrustfully a half dozen or more of the buzzing creatures, that were chasing each other up and down the sunny window-pane. He was loath, however, to make himself any extra trouble.

The molasses jug stood within his reach. "That'll fix 'em," said he, catching it up

and smearing its contents over the butter. "Now they can't trouble it, 'cause, if they come round, they'll get stuck fast in the molasses."

He stood and regarded his stratagem with great admiration.

"Dave, Dave, come along; we want you."

Both of his brothers were shouting for him; so he returned to the kitchen, and found dish-washing in full operation.

"Sol says I can't wipe as fast as he can wash," cried Jacob, flourishing a huge towel, which was, in fact, the hand-roller. "Now you just stand by and take the dishes. I'll keep Sol busy enough, I bet."

Solomon, who wanted "plenty of room," was using the wash-boiler for a dish-pan; and as he piled the clean dishes in the sink beside him, he "stumped" Jacob in the wiping line.

Jacob, however, declared "it wan't fair," on account of the table where he was obliged to deposit being some rods distant. But David's taking the dishes settled this point.

And now the three did a driving business. Solomon spattered the hot water right and left, Jacob polished off, and David scuttled from the sink to the table, and from the table to the sink again, with the rapidity of a rocket.

At last Solomon came to the last dish. Jacob, who had just delivered the last but one, stood by, with a leer of triumph, to receive it; while David, with both hands on his hips, looked on with a broad smile.

Suddenly the table gave a warning groan. The boys turned quickly; but before they could prevent it, — before a word could be said, or a motion made, — the downfall of stone china and the pine table came.

Coffee-cups, saucers, plates, pitchers, platters, were scattered upon the floor in the wildest confusion, and in every sort of broken-nosed, broken-handled, and broken-backed condition.

For a few seconds the boys stood aghast at the heap of ruins before them. Solomon first found voice.

"How could you be so stupid, Dave!" he exclaimed. "Didn't you know any better than to pile all the dishes on the leaf of the table? Of course it would tumble."

"I — I didn't think," stammered poor Dave.

"Well," said Jacob, good-naturedly, "let's pick up the pieces. No use of crying for spilt milk now."

There was not one single bit of crockery-ware but was marred, maimed, and disabled. The rims of the plates were nicked out into uncouth scollops and angles, the pitcher that wasn't noseless had a crack down the middle, the cups that were not handleless had the bottoms knocked out, some of the glass was ground to powder. Such were the melancholy facts.

There was nothing to be done but to "pick up the pieces," as Jacob had said. They filled the clothes-basket full.

By this time the forenoon was nearly spent. Luckily, at this point, the boys bethought themselves of the cow that stood in

the barn waiting to be milked, and th horse that had not yet been watered.

These tasks were accomplished withou any damage, the boys being used to them But they took no note of time, and whe they returned to the house, after turning th animals out to pasture, they were greete with a most unodorous smell.

"Whew!" said Solomon, who was ahea holding on to his nose; "somethin's burn in'."

It was the beans. The water had boile out, and they were burnt to the pot.

The matter was fully investigated, and th verdict, "Black as your shoe," pronounce by Jacob, with a solemn face.

"And we as hungry as wolves," crie David.

"We must hunt up something else," replied Solomon.

Whereupon a committee of three adjourned, post haste, to the pantry. Bu here they met with the fate of Mothe Hubbard's dog, when the old lady went t

the cupboard to get him a bone. If you remember, "when she got there, the cupboard was bare, and so the poor dog had none."

Mrs. Down had had something more to think about lately than the stocking of her cupboard. The consequence was, the boys came across nothing more than a plate of salt fish and a loaf of stale bread. These were not at all to their tastes.

David thought regretfully of the meat he had plied the cat so lavishly with in the morning, and the minds of Solomon and Jacob wandered to the bread and potatoes they had wasted upon the hens and turkeys.

It was now about the middle of the afternoon. By going to the village, a distance of, perhaps, half a mile, their wants could be easily supplied; for the Downs had a standing bill at butcher's, and baker's, and candlestick maker's. But nobody was willing to go.

"I can't," said Jacob; "the road's too dry and dusty."

"I don't want to," demurred David, not quite so bold.

Of course Solomon's dignity would not allow of his going.

"Why can't we cook something," said Jacob, who was always finding easy ways out of difficulties.

"Ah!" cried Solomon, as if inspired, drawing a long breath; "I'll make a pudding."

"Ebenezer!" exclaimed Jacob, by way of applause.

"What kind would you make?" inquired Solomon. "Baked, or boiled, or stewed?"

"I like baked," returned Jacob, "with lots of raisins and fixins."

"I like biled injun," said David, smacking his lips at the bare thought.

"Well, I ain't particular," responded Solomon. "I'll make it a little of both kinds."

This decision gave pleasure all round, and it was agreed that the pudding should be commenced at once.

CHAPTER VI.

THE THREE DAYS' PUDDING.

"FIRST," said Solomon, wisely, "we must make the dough."

He was standing, at the time of this speech, by the little table under the pantry window. One of his mother's capacious aprons was tied about his neck like a bib. In his hand he held a large iron spoon, and before him was a mammoth earthen dish, in which he proposed to make the pudding. Jacob was leaning with both elbows on the table, in a state of breathless attention, and David was sitting on the sugar-bucket with eyes of expectation.

"Come, be lively," called Solomon, who alone seemed to master the situation. "Don't stand there like a post, Jake. Get me some flour."

Jacob's head and shoulders disappeared into the flour-barrel.

"Now, Dave," continued Solomon, "just fetch along a little water. All I've got to do is to pour it on my flour, stir it up with my spoon, and there's my dough."

"What'll I get the water in?" asked David.

"O, anything — one of those pans on the shelf."

David did as he was bid, and returned in a few minutes on a run.

"Here," cried he, breathlessly, holding out his pan, "take it quick; it's leaking awfully."

The water was running through the bottom of the pan in dozens of little streams.

Solomon's first look was of perplexity, but Jacob's mouth stretched from ear to ear.

"What a rousin' joke!" said he. "Look, Sol! if he ain't got the colander!"

"You needn't laugh, you dough-face, you," retorted David, nettled at Jacob's ridicule.

Jacob was as white as a miller. His hair

was powdered with flour, and his face did certainly look doughy.

It did not put him out, though, that the laugh turned on him. His temper was not easily ruffled.

"Come, boys," at last called their head and chief; "we've got work to do. We can't stop to fool all the time."

So business was resumed again. David strongly objected to a second trip for water.

"I don't see why you can't use molasses instead," said he; "and that'll sweeten the pudding too."

"That's an idea!" remarked Jacob.

So the molasses was turned upon the flour, and Solomon stirred it into a paste.

"Now, let's think," said he, slowly; "we must have eggs to make it light."

"Here's a whole lot of them things;" and Jacob reached down a dishful.

"Sixteen will do," said Solomon, breaking that number into the pudding, and throwing the shells upon the floor. "Put the rest away."

Jacob set them on the sugar-bucket.

"And now for the raisins," continued the amateur cook.

"What!" exclaimed Jacob. "You don't say you've got to the fixins so soon?"

"Why not? It's the easiest thing in the world to make a pudding; that is, when you know how. Hurry up the raisins; I'm waiting."

He stirred the mixture briskly, while Jacob rummaged over the boxes on the shelf.

"Here they are," said he; "and here's citron, and currants, and dried orange-peel; and here's a bottle of vanilla essence. O, and here's the spice-box!"

He had his arms full. "David, you get the essence," he went on, as he unloaded himself. "It's that little bottle right up in the corner."

And then with the most pleasurable emotions he looked on, as Solomon threw in half a dozen handfuls of raisins, some orange-peel that he tore into strips with his fingers, some citron which he cut up into

lumps an inch square with the carving-knife, a grating of nutmeg, and a pinch of everything else in the spice-box, including even pepper and saffron.

David stood by with the bottle of essence. "Pour in a little," ordered Solomon.

"Seems to me," said Jacob, "it runs out very slow."

"It's the thick kind, I guess," commented Solomon. "Hold on!"

This last was to David, who restored his bottle to the perpendicular, and put in the stopper.

"Now," cried Solomon, flourishing his iron spoon, "it only wants stirring;" and he fell to work with a will.

"It'll be bunkum — won't it, Dave?" exclaimed Jacob.

"I don't see where the biled injun part comes in," said David, complainingly.

"Why, I forgot all about that; but wait; it ain't too late yet. I'll put some injun meal in now."

David's peace was restored, and he grew

as enthusiastic as Jacob over the black-looking mixture which Solomon was belaboring.

"There," at length panted Solomon, "my arm's ready to drop off. I shan't stir it a bit more."

I don't think Professor Blot, the famous cook, would have been satisfied with the looks of Solomon's pudding. The indian meal, not having been stirred in thoroughly, made light-colored streaks across the top of it, while here and there a bit of orange-peel peeped through, or a square of citron lumped up, in a very queer and comical manner.

Those that did look upon it, however, thought it perfection.

"You might give us a taste," petitioned Jacob; which being done, he smacked his lips, and then he made an odd face.

"How is it?" inquired Solomon.

"Well," Jacob rather hesitated, "it — it tastes."

"It's all right, I know. You can't tell anything about it before it's baked."

With some difficulty, the pudding, in the same dish in which it had been made, was carried to the oven. Here two more troubles met them. The fire was out, and the pudding-dish too big for the oven.

What was to be done?

"Boil it!" called out David.

"That wouldn't be bad," remarked Jacob.

"If there was a pot big enough," added Solomon.

"Put it in the wash-boiler," said Jacob. "Why ain't it just as good to boil a pudding as to wash dishes in?"

Jacob's proposition carried the day. A fire was kindled under the wash-boiler, which was mopped out and filled with cold water, and the pudding, tied up in one of Mrs. Down's best pillow-cases, with insertion let in and a broad lace-frill on the top, was plumped therein. It sunk to the bottom like lead.

The hungry boys stood guard over the wash-boiler, counting the lagging moments with feverish impatience. They amused

themselves, from time to time, by poking the pudding with the clothes-stick.

Solomon had said, "Half an hour will do it." But at the end of half an hour the water had just begun to steam, and the pudding, having been hoisted out, was found to be in the same raw condition as when first put in.

The three faces fell a little; but encouraged by the prediction of a half an hour more doing it up "brown," they did not completely lose heart, though Jacob declared he was "as holler inside as a drum," and David averred that "even shoe-leather would go down."

At the end of the second half hour, as was to be expected, the pudding was still undone. Then, indeed, did the boys' courage fail them. Jacob laid the blame on Solomon.

"You don't know any more about cooking than a born goose," said he.

David left them to their war of words, and stole into the pantry. The stale bread

and salt fish seemed to him now most desirable. Placing these refreshments upon the belittered and bedaubed table, — for of course the boys had not been overclean in their cookery; neither had they thought of putting anything away, — he knocked over the bottle of essence.

He picked it up, looking rather startled, for on the label was printed plainly "Castor Oil."

"No wonder it run out slow," thought he, staring at it blankly.

He heard his brothers coming, and all in a flutter he hastened to set it back on the shelf. "I'll just keep that shady," he said.

In a quarter of a minute more, Solomon and Jacob had entered the pantry, and found David, with a very red face, sitting in the dish of eggs so carelessly left on the sugar-bucket.

To wind up the first day, suffice it to say that the boys retired to bed early, quite tired out with their day's experience. They left

the front door wide open. The pudding remained in soak in the wash-boiler.

"We will set it to boiling in the morning," said Solomon, "and have it for dinner."

The second day we need not dwell on. The butcher's and baker's carts came round, and the boys obtained a plentiful supply of cake, and pies, and bread. The butcher's wares were not patronized, for it was decided by a unanimous voice that cookery was "a slow trade," and, as Jacob expressed it, "a little too much like work."

They did not, however, desert the pudding. David's eagerness on this point was not quite on a par with that of his brothers. But this he artfully concealed.

The mammoth pudding boiled merrily all the forenoon. It popped up, it bobbed about in its lumbering way, and had a jolly, bubbling time of it. But it would seem that all this wriggling and bouncing and jiggling was indulged in solely for its own amusement, since, when at noon Solomon punched

it through with the skewer, it was still raw and uneatable.

"I've a good mind to chuck it in the pig-trough," he exclaimed, savagely.

"No, I wouldn't," objected Jacob, who was "slow to anger; "tie her up and put her back again."

I cannot tell why he called the pudding "her."

Rather sulkily Solomon dropped his handiwork into the boiler again.

"I don't believe there's any cook to it," he said; "but I'll keep it boiling all day long to-morrow, and see if that'll fetch it."

"I guess it will," replied Jacob; "we'll have it smoking hot for supper. Mother'll relish it, I know."

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW ORDER OF THINGS.

THE long train dashed into the depot. The heavy brazen bell swung out a dizzy, deafening "ding dong, dong ding, ding ding." There were not a very great many to get out. Most of the passengers were going on farther.

Among the few that stepped upon the platform were Mrs. Down and Becky.

Mrs. Down tottered rather than walked. Her shoulders were bent; her face, seen through her veil, looked like an old woman's. She seemed aged full twenty years since her departure three days before.

"I can't walk," she said, feebly, to Becky. "We'll take the Accommodation home."

The "Accommodation" was a small trap of an omnibus, with window-frames that

were windowless, and a doorway void of a door.

In this well-ventilated and summery conveyance, the town folks, by payment of a fixed fare, could be "accommodated" to and from the depot.

"Here they come!" shouted David, who was on the lookout at the front door. "They're in Noah's Ark."

By the time the "Accommodation" had rattled up to the house, the other two boys had run out.

Such a chorus of exclamations as there were!

"O, mother," cried Solomon, "supper is all ready."

"O, mother," said Jacob, "the pudding's done."

"O, mother," put in David, in his turn, "I've been looking for you this ever so long."

Their mother tried to smile, but quite broke down. She could hardly speak to them.

"Mother is not well," explained Becky,

leading the way into the house. "The journey was too much for her."

Mrs. Down, when divested of bonnet and shawl, did indeed look sick. Her hands trembled like one with the palsy.

"Come and eat something," urged David.

"Won't you?" asked Jacob.

"Do!" added Solomon.

"You must be faint," said Becky; "you have eaten nothing but a cracker all day."

Mrs. Down protested, in the weakest way, that "she wasn't hungry; that she couldn't swallow a mouthful;" but, in the end, she sat down to the table with the children.

The pudding loomed up in the centre, and, overlapping the platter which held it, rested its soddened sides upon the table-cloth.

"What's that?" asked Becky, strongly impressed.

"That's my pudding," replied Solomon, with becoming modesty.

Becky laughed outright, and even her mother smiled. David, too, snickered out

nervously, though the next minute he looked anxious. But Jacob was full of faith. "The proof of the pudding's in the eating," said he, "and I don't know why this won't be good. I'm sure there's lots of good things in it."

"I'll cut it," quoth Solomon.

But the carving-knife was dull, or the pudding hard, for he did not make much headway.

"It's like a brickbat!" exclaimed he, at length, in disgust; for he could only hack little chips off it that looked like iron filings.

Jacob took up one, and tried to chew it. "Ow! Oo!" he cried, dropping his lower jaw; and, bouncing up from his chair, he ran and spit it out the window.

"What's the matter? Ain't it good?" asked Solomon.

"Good for them that like ipecac," replied Jacob, with a wry visage.

"I should like a good cup of tea," murmured Mrs. Down. "This is as bitter as wormwood."

"I'm sure I don't see what should ail that," said Solomon. "I steeped it the whole afternoon."

"And there's just where you made a mess of it," exclaimed Becky, pulling out a little black-glazed tea-pot from the back of the closet.

"Well," declared poor Solomon, "all I've got to say is, that cooking's a humbug."

Becky's cup of tea brightened up her mother wonderfully. She inquired of the boys how they had got along, and if anything had happened in the neighborhood while she had been gone.

"I don't suppose," said she in a broken voice, "we shall be thought much of, now that we are poor. We've got a roof to shelter us this winter, but mercy knows what will become of us then."

"There, mother, don't you worry any more about it," put in Becky, soothingly; "we children will all go to work, and you shall live like a queen."

"I guess we *will* work," cried Jacob, with

energy. He was the slowest and laziest of all. "I guess we will. I feel the snap of ten men in me now."

"Yes, mother, we'll take care of you," chorused David and Solomon; and Mrs. Down smiled through her tears.

"You are a great comfort to me, children," said she.

The boys had good hearts, though their heads were not over wise; and inspired with the occasion, they pounded their knife-handles upon the table, spilled their tea, and indulged in the wildest flights of fancy.

"I," declared David, "will go in a balloon to the Valley of Diamonds. I'll carry sixteen trunks, and bring them home to you all full." He got this idea from Sinbad the Sailor, a favorite book of his. Indeed, this plan, which he now unfolded, he had often thought over in secret.

"I," said Solomon, who had lately been putting old Zeb through a course of Rarey training, strapping up one foot, in imitation of the great horse-tamer, and allowing poor

Zeb, who was much astonished at the treatment, to hop about on his remaining three pegs, much to the delight of a juvenile crowd, invited to see the fun, — "I," said David, "will go out on the prairies, and lasso wild horses, and tame them. And then, mother, you shall ride in a coach and four, and I'll drive a six-in-hand. I'll sell my horses for ten thousand dollars apiece. All clear profit — do you see?"

"And I," concluded Jacob, who took to the water as naturally as a fish, "will be a sea captain, and go pearl-diving. I can make no end of money, and when I get my ship full of gold dollars, I'll come home, and pour 'em all into your lap."

Their mother told them again that they were "a comfort" to her. "Only," added she, "you make my head crack."

Upon this, Becky spirited her into the next room, and, bringing a pillow, had her lie down on the chintz-covered lounge. She also brought the camphor bottle for her mother to smell, and she changed her own black dress for a calico.

By the time she returned to the kitchen, the three knights of fortune had quite got over their grand enthusiasm. They lounged on the chairs, leaned lazily against the tables, and were very curious to know all about the journey, and aunt Biddles, and their two cousins; what they had said, what they had done, and how they had looked.

Becky talked and washed up the dishes at the same time.

"You see," said she, when she had given them all the particulars, "that we must work or starve."

This was bringing it rather close home.

"Any way," said Solomon, "Zeb shan't be sold, nor Brindle either."

"I hope they won't have to be," returned Becky, as she wrung out the dish-cloth; "but I don't know how else we'll get any money."

"Ain't we going to earn it?"

Becky smiled. "O, yes; by horse-taming, and pearl-diving, and balloon-sailing."

"Well, of course," said Solomon, looking

a little foolish, "we can't do those things right away now, this winter; but we can do something else."

"What?"

Solomon scratched his head, and thought seriously.

"Why," said he, at last, "there's Mr. Greene, the fisherman. I was riding on his cart the other day, and I could put as good a toot on his horn as he could himself. He said he expected to be laid up with the rheumatiz, when the cold weather came on. I shouldn't wonder if he'd give me a chance."

"That sounds sensible!" exclaimed Becky.

There was a pause here, during which Jacob and David seemed to be solving some knotty problem.

Finally, Jacob remarked that he was "tired to death of going to school." He went, in term-time, about one day in five. In the fall there was a three months' vacation.

"We've just begun syntax," added he, "and I hate it worse than poison. I had a sight rather work in a store. I'll try down to the grocery. Bob and me are great friends."

Bob Skittles was the grocer's own son, who helped him in the store.

"I might do chores somewhere," said David. "Perhaps they'll take me up to Cherry Farm."

Cherry Farm was a half mile up the road. The Downs had their milk from there, and "Cherry Farm" butter, and cheese, and eggs were always at a premium. The Cherry Farm fruits and vegetables were always the earliest and best in the market. It was a model establishment, and one that employed many hands.

"I don't see," commented Becky, with satisfaction, "why we can't get along first rate. I shall go into the yarn factory, down in the village. I thought of that coming home in the cars; and mother will have nothing to do but to keep house for us."

"Hooray!" shouted Solomon, breaking into a double-shuffle; "everything's slick as a whistle."

"And old Marm Biddles can keep her money for all us. We'll have enough without it," exclaimed David, with a snap of his fingers.

"What *shall* I do with this pudding?" said Becky, eying it with perplexity.

"Give it here," cried Jacob, waking up, his eyes twinkling. "Let's have some fun with it."

"Fun!" that was enough to make the three forget everything.

Jacob lugged his burden to the door, and launched it on the grass.

"Come on, boys," was his invitation. "It's just the thing to play football with. My first kick."

With screams of laughter the sport began. Becky watched them a little while, standing on the door-rock. Finally, under their hammerings and batterings, the pudding broke into half a dozen pieces. All

three tumbled head over heels after one particular piece. The nimblest sent it whizzing through the air, and as it fell there was another headlong rush for it. The boys laughed so, that they held on to their sides, and were bent almost double.

"Ah," thought Becky, with a keen look on her young face, "they mean well, but they never'll take to work as they do to play."

She turned and went into the house, walking slowly and heavily, as if a weight had been suddenly laid on her shoulders.

CHAPTER VIII.

WORKING FOR A LIVING.

IT need not be stated just how, nor exactly when, the boys entered jubilantly upon their respective businesses, and commenced earning their bread by the sweat of their brows.

It is sufficient to say that the first application of each was signally fortunate. They were all "taken in and done for," as Jacob expressed it, on short notice.

David was up at Cherry Farm, Jacob hob-nobbed with Bob Skittles, and Solomon tooted the fish-horn.

It is to be presumed that pity and an honest and hearty desire to help the Downs in their adversity prompted largely towards the employment of the trio; for their rolicking, frolicking tendencies were well known in the neighborhood.

But Farmer Yates, the owner of Cherry Farm, said in his bluff, blunt way, "We'll give 'em a chance, and see what'll come on't. There's no telling what a colt'll make till you've driven him in harness."

Mr. Skittles and Mr. Greene expressed the same idea, though not quite in the same words.

But while the boys had passed thus easily into the sunshine of success, Becky's dream of serving in the yarn factory had grown less and less.

For Mrs. Down's eventful journey, with all its attendant sorrows and ills, had quite prostrated her. She was attacked with a low nervous fever, which reduced her to a skeleton, and weakened her to such an extent that she was not able to lift her head from her pillow.

This, of course, detained Becky at home. Nurse, night-watcher, housekeeper, cook,—all these posts she was called upon to fill; and though she did not "work for her living," as the boys often boasted of doing, she

found that time did not hang heavily on her hands.

Her duties as nurse alone would have been quite sufficient, one would think, since her mother was as capricious as a child, and distractingly querulous and exacting.

The demands made upon her by her brothers, in the cooking line, were also difficult to meet. For though David crammed himself with fruit at the farm, and Jacob helped himself largely to pea-nuts and dried apples in company with Bob Skittles, and Solomon indulged in private clam-bakes in Mr. Greene's back yard,— in spite of all these stomach props and linings, the boys trooped in at meal-times like ravening wolves. Hungry? You'd better believe so! Only the word is a hundred times too tame for the awful gnawing which kept see-sawing up and down within them.

The manifold duties laid upon Becky did not bend nor break her. She really seemed to be made of sterner stuff than flesh and blood. The doctor marvelled, and the

neighbors who often dropped in to give Becky a "lift," or to sit a while with her mother, expressed their astonishment at seeing her "take hold of things so handy."

Somehow the Downs were not expected to be "much." Not that they were considered black sheep, or anything of that kind, but they had always had the name of being so slack, and wasteful, and incapable. To be sure, Becky had never been quite like the rest. Even as a baby, if you remember, she had always been an "Upside" Down, an odd one, an "original." But so far she had done nothing startling, unless it were to launch out of all family form and likeness, to shoot up like a bean-stalk, and to be bony and muscular, when by good rights she should have been fat and flabby.

Now, at last, she began to be called "smart." Indeed, for a young woman of twelve to be able to keep house and hospital together, as she did, — not that everything was done perfectly, — was very remarkable.

How many of my readers, of the same gender and age, could have done it?

Miss Riggs, who during these times hopped in and out of Mrs. Down's, like an unusually spry ground-sparrow, chirped it round triumphantly that "Becky had more in the tip-end of her little finger than the rest had in their whole bodies," and that *she* had "always said so."

All this, however, must not blind us to the honors due to Cæsar, that is, the three boys, who at the end of the fifth week were still in love with "working for a living."

At night, around the supper-table, they rehearsed, for each other's benefit and edification, the leading events of the day.

"I say," cried Jacob, with his mouth full, on one of these interesting occasions, "you never see such fun as there was down to our place this afternoon."

Solomon and David looked up inquiringly, which was all they could do, since each had the blade of his knife half way down his throat.

Jacob continued: "Bob's father has been away all day a-visiting some of his wife's mother's relations, so Bob said, and old Skinny Podgers came in. Bob groaned when he saw him. 'Cat's foot!' said he; 'don't I hate to have him round the worst kind! He'll ask the price of everything in the shop, from a lamp-wick up to a hogshead of molasses, and he won't buy the value of two cents' worth.' 'You leave him to me, Bob,' said I; and I tipped him a wink at the same time. Then I turned to old Skinny Podgers. 'How are you to-day?' said I; 'so glad to see you!' 'What's the price of them?' croaked he, poking his cane into a barrel of crackers. 'Seven dollars,' said I. 'How much are they *'apiece?'* croaked he again. 'But you don't think of buying less than a barrel — do you?' asked I. 'You know you can't get cheated in crackers the way you can in apples, for crackers are the same size all the way down. The big ones ain't all on top. Now just let me send this lot up to you. You'll find 'em handy things

to have in the house.' You ought to have seen the stare he gave me. Then he grinned sideways. 'You hain't the gift of gab nor nothin', eh, Jakib?' chuckled he. 'Then you'll take the crackers,' said I. 'When'll I send 'em?' 'I ain't pertickler, Jakib,' he said. 'How much is butter a pound?' 'Twenty dollars a firkin,' answered I. 'It's a great deal cheaper in the end, buying it that way. I know you'll like it when you get it home. Shall I send it with the crackers?' 'I don't objec'. He, he!' laughed he. I looked over across at Bob. He was sitting behind the desk, wriggling round on the high stool like an eel, trying to keep the snickers in. 'How's coffee?' went on old Podgers. 'Twenty-five dollars a b-ba—'" Here the story-teller choked.

All through his harangue he had kept up his eating and drinking, and now (it's a wonder it hadn't happened before), a swallow of tea had gone the wrong way. He had such a fit of strangling that Solomon jumped up and pounded him on his back without mercy.

"H-hold on!" at last gasped Jacob, his face the color of a lobster.

He wiped the tears out of his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, and leaned back quite exhausted.

"Go ahead," said David, eager for the rest of his story.

"I'll give short-hand notes now, I guess," breathed Jacob, in a croupy voice. "Every bit of wind's knocked out of me. I kept on with Podgers till I had put him down for a whole truck full of things, and Bob, he couldn't keep it back any longer, but he hee-hawed right out. I thought he would go out of his skin. I reckoned on Podgers getting mad; but he didn't: he only turned round, as he was going out the door, and said, kind of dry, 'Nothin' like havin' a little fun, boys.'"

"Tip-top!" commented Solomon. "But what'll Mr. Skittles say?"

"He'll be tickled to death. Why, it's a good week's sale."

"I'm a thinking," remarked Becky, "that

you've got yourself into a scrape. Mr. Podgers will never pay for all those things. I wouldn't have sent them."

"Pooh! girls are always afraid," rejoined Jacob; "besides, the things ain't sent yet; but they are all loaded to go up the first thing in the morning."

"I did a neat thing this morning," said Solomon, who was lying back in his chair, with his eyes shut, picking his teeth with his jackknife. "You know widow O'Neil's boarding-house? I went there to-day with a basket of eels. She makes chowder of 'em. Buys 'em with the heads and tails on. It all goes into the chowder. Well, Mrs. O'Neil's got a nasty, yellow-haired little puppy. Sometimes she takes him out, holding him by a string. Just as I was driving round the corner, jogging along, taking it kind of easy, who should I meet but them two! So I up with my whip, just for fun, and I shook it and poked it at the little dog, and set him to growling, and snarling, and snapping his teeth. This made Mrs. O'Neil

look up. 'I'd thank you,' said she, 'not to spoil my dog's temper.' 'It's spoiled already, ma'am,' said I. Then the little beast broke the string, and came barking after me, and I picked up a clam-shell out of the bottom of the cart, and let him have it. It took him right in the teeth. The best hit I ever made. Didn't I roar? and wan't Mrs. O'Neil mad? You ought to have seen the puppy spit out the clam-shell and scoot. You could have heard him ky-yi half a mile."

"O," cried David, putting in his oar, "such a nest of mice as I found up in the hay-loft to-day! The men were spreading straw down in the barn cellar, and Mr. Yates sent me after some pitchforks in the corner of the hay-loft; and there I come upon the nest. I run licketty-split into the house after the cat; but she wan't there. I hunted and looked for her everywhere; but I couldn't find her. I only wish I had."

"You forgot all about the pitchforks, I suppose," said Becky.

"No, I didn't, either; only when I carried

'em down, the men had got through. They didn't want 'em."

Becky shook her head. It was a trick she had. She did it very often at the supper-table, while listening to the boys' gossip.

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE IN THE CAMP.

"DAVID," said Farmer Yates, one day, rather suddenly, "wasn't it yesterday, that you braided all the horses' tails, but forgot to water them?"

"Yes, sir," responded David.

"And wasn't it the day before, that you gave sugar to the pigeons, and killed a dozen of 'em?"

"Well — but — I didn't mean to. I didn't know it would hurt 'em," stammered David, wondering dimly what the farmer was "up to."

"And wasn't it the day before that, that you were too lazy to pump fresh water for the hens, and filled the pans with ditch water, and gave all the chickens the pip?"

"O!" said David, drawing a long breath. "I'm sure I —"

But the farmer unceremoniously cut him short, and went on with his catalogue of misdemeanors.

"And wasn't it the day before the hen-scrape, that you lost me a whole hogshead of cider, by forgetting to turn the stop, and flooded the cellar, and spoilt all the turnips, and beets, and carrots laying on the floor?"

David nodded his head. "Somethin's to pay," thought he.

"Well," continued Mr. Yates, "you ought ter have had your walking-ticket long ago; but I've been kinder keepin' you along, thinking you might turn over a new leaf. But there ain't any turn over to you, David, as I see. So here's your wages up to Saturday night, and you needn't come agin."

Thus David was cut adrift with a three-dollar bill.

This was but the beginning of troubles. Mr. Skittles no sooner heard what Mr. Yates had done, than he followed suit, and dismissed Jacob.

He declared that he hated to do it, and

that he was as willing to befriend the Downs as ever.

"But," he added, "there's no more business in Jacob than in a jumping-jack. He's all for fun and play, and he's made Bob as light-headed as a top. Before Jacob came, Bob did very well; but now he ain't fit for nothing. He might as well go before he makes any more mischief."

Mr. Skittles had reference here to Jacob's little affair with Mr. Podgers. Mr. Podgers, or "Skinny Podgers," as the boys had nicknamed him throughout the town, was a dried-up, miserly old bachelor, who kept house all alone by himself—who shuttered his cobwebby windows, and barred his dusty doors, and on no pretext whatever allowed any human being but himself to cross his threshold. Of course he was no favorite with anybody, and the rather flippant way he had been treated by Jacob would have passed without censure, had it not been for consequences.

It seemed that the old man had, in reality,

got very angry at Jacob's treatment of him in the grocery store, and he determined to make trouble if he could.

When the loaded truck drove up to his door, he was sitting up stairs, looking out of his chamber window, through a hole in the curtain.

The teamster rapped the skin off his knuckles, but Mr. Podgers did not stir to go to the door. At last, his patience failing, the teamster applied the toe of his boot, and kicked vigorously. The invisible Podgers sat still and smiled.

"Begarry!" exclaimed the teamster, who was lately from Cork. "Bad luck to yees, Mister Hodge-podge, an' I'll jist dump ye things right down in the snow foreninst yer door. Ye'll stale out, I suppose, like a thafe in the night, whin I'm gone, and take thim in."

So the groceries were piled up, and left. There was the barrel of crackers, the firkin of butter, the bag of coffee, with sundry other barrels, and boxes, and bundles, which quite barricaded the front door.

If the event had happened in the middle of the day, it would have drawn a crowd; but, being dusk, the strange arrival was unnoticed.

During the night there came a heavy fall of snow, which sifted in and filled up the chinks between the boxes and barrels, and piled itself on top, and turned the rather ungainly heap into a beautiful, great white sugar-loaf.

The neighbors thought it rather strange that "the snow should have drifted so, up against Podgers's door." They took it for granted that it *was* snow, and thought nothing more about it.

Nearly a week passed, and day after day the sun poured down hotly, and thawed the snow, and at night it froze again, till the sugar-loaf became a solid mass of ice.

And all this time Mr. Skittles remained in ignorance of the whole transaction. Bob had not put down the sale in the books. For after the first joke of the thing was over, he declared to Jacob that he felt

"awful ticklish" about it, and, for the life of him, didn't dare to tell his father.

Every day made it harder to broach the subject; and at last Mr. Podgers himself appeared in the store. Jacob stood behind the counter, weighing out sugar, and Mr. Skittles sat near, on a flour-barrel, reading the newspaper.

"Mornin', sonny," said Mr. Podgers to Jacob. "I'll take a cent's worth of snuff. Mornin', sir," to Mr. Skittles, who glanced up from his paper.

He laid down a greasy copper upon the counter, as Jacob tendered him his purchase.

"You ain't so funny as you was t'other day — air you?" said he. "Don't you think you'd better send for that cart-load of things? They've been a-standing out in the snow, just where the truckman left 'em, ever sence. I guess they're pooty well seasoned by this time."

Mr. Skittles pricked up his ears, and pushed his spectacles over his forehead, so

that his short, wiry hair stood up straight like a fringe, and Jacob looked nervously at Bob, who turned from red to white, and wriggled on his high stool, this time in agony, not, as before, in joy.

"What cart-load of things are you speaking about, Mr. Podgers?" asked Mr. Skittles, knowing by the appearance of the boys that they had been engaged in some sort of caper.

"Jakib'll tell ye," said the old man, rubbing his bony hands together, with a chuckle. "So you hain't heerd of the fun the boys had?"

"Well, Jacob," spoke up Mr. Skittles, sternly, "what trick have you and Bob been up to now?"

"There warn't no trick about it," answered Jacob, rather hesitatingly. "I sent a cart-load of groceries over to Mr. Podgers's house the day you was away. He bought 'em."

"You've stretched the last part a leetle, Jakib," said Mr. Podgers, leaning upon the counter and growing excited as he went on.

"You see, Mr. Skittles, I didn't buy the things. I didn't want 'em. I didn't tell him to send 'em. But I thought I'd let him have his fun out, he was so bent upon it; and any time you want yer goods you kin have 'em. There they air, in my yard, right by the front door, cased in ice a foot thick."

"But—but," gasped Mr. Skittles, getting angry in his turn, "you had no business to leave them out in that way to spoil. You shall pay for them. I'll sue you for damages."

"You kin do it, Mr. Skittles; but you won't make nothin' by it. I kin prove Jakib sent the things all of his own 'cord. You kin send for 'em, or not, jest as you please. There they air. I shan't tech 'em;" and the old man hobbled away, muttering and mumbling.

After his first heat was over, Mr. Skittles concluded that it would not be best to put his threat into execution, and he sent after the groceries without more ado. It was something of a job, digging them from

their bed of ice, and some were spoiled. You may believe that this affair was put down to Jacob's discredit. Indeed, as you see, at the time of his dismissal it was brought up against him.

"It never rains but it pours." Solomon verified this saying by retiring from the fish business at short notice. If he had been booked in the Directory, just now, he would have figured there as "Solomon Down, gentleman," which *may* mean vagabond.

Mr. Greene followed the lead of Mr. Yates and Mr. Skittles. His complaints were of the same nature.

"He loses custom for me," he said. "If I kept him six months longer, he'd run the business into the ground. He's a good horn-tooter. That's his strong point; but he ain't to be depended on in anything else."

It was now the dead of winter. It seemed as though the Down family were on their very last legs. Becky had no chance at

the yarn factory. It was the middle of the season, and every place was full.

Mrs. Down had recovered, but she looked as gaunt as a clothes-pole, and spent her time in tears and vain regrets.

"What have I done," she said, time and again, "to be brought so low as this? Why should I be left a pauper in my old age? Why should I be sent to die in the alms-house? And my poor children — what's to become of them?"

There were five mouths to feed. They ate up the chairs, sofa, and tables in the "best room," even the Kidderminster carpet, and the tall, astral-lamp on the mantel-piece. Then old Brindle went, and finally Zeb. O, how the children cried over the two last!

"It's a shame," exclaimed little Miss Riggs, "and they riding in their carriage with a coachman on before." The "they" meant the Biddles.

There were others of the neighbors who also declared it "a shame;" but the Downs

were too despondent to appreciate sympathy.

One day Mrs. Down made a sudden, and, for her, a desperate resolve.

"I'll try the pin and needle store," said she. "I'll sell the chaise, and sleigh, and wagon." And then she folded her hands as though she were going to be burned at the stake, and the end of all things had come.

So a little more money was raised, and the half of a candy shop hired, and a stock of pins and needles, thread, tapes, cotton laces, and other "varieties," laid in, and the Downs were fairly started on their new tack.

The townsfolk, however, looked dubiously at the smart string of striped mittens that festooned Mrs. Down's half of the shop-door, and Bob Skittles told Jacob, in confidence, what his father had said.

"He said — he said," repeated Bob, whose memory was rather short than otherwise — "I can't remember just exactly the words, but he meant you'd go slump."

Jacob, who was standing at the time on the shop doorstep, was too happily elated in the hopes of his mother's realizing a speedy fortune to be cast down by trifles.

So he regarded Bob with a superior smile, while he answered, "Stuff! What does *your* father know 'bout anything 'cept split peas and apple-jack? *We* don't sell such things *here*."

CHAPTER X.

THE PIN AND NEEDLE STORE.

AT first there was quite an influx of people. All the old dames and gossips in town came to condole with Mrs. Down, and to satisfy their curiosity; but very few came to buy.

Mrs. Down, however, was so fully occupied in receiving her visitors, and in telling over the story of her woes, that the end and aim of her store-keeping — the making of money — was, for the time being, quite forgotten.

She luxuriated in her misery. She sat bolt upright behind the counter, with the face of a martyr. If all the pins and needles in the store had been stuffed into the cushion of her chair, she could not have looked more distressed. And while she

sighed, and wiped melancholy tears out of her eyes, and chit-chatted in the most doleful voice, the three boys lay in a row on the counter, eying longingly the tempting array of candy and sugar-plums on the other side of the establishment.

"Poor boys!" their mother would say, occasionally distributing a few pennies amongst them; "it's a pity they can't have peppermints and lemon lozenges, when they've always been used to them."

After the nine days' wonder Mrs. Down found her shop deserted. In vain she hung an extra pair of scarlet-ribbed hose in the window, and displayed fresh pink and green worsted hoods. The few customers that did stray in her way confined themselves to the purchase of hair-pins and spool-thread, darning-needles and steel thimbles, and "such like small trash," as she complained to Miss Riggs one day.

The little mantua-maker had done *her* best towards supporting the pin and needle store. The number of pairs of stockings she had

bought was something surprising. And the yards on yards of bugle-trimmings, the dozens on dozens of buttons, and the quantities of other dress-findings (linings, facings, hooks and eyes, and whalebones), that she indulged in, was more than wonderful.

She was just now very busily engaged in deciding upon the respective merits of the pink and green worsted hoods, the identical pink and green in the window, with a view to the adornment of baby Riggs's head.

"You mustn't get discouraged so soon," she said, in answer to Mrs. Down's complaint. "It takes a long time to get started. I found that out when I first went into the dress-making line." She laid down the pink hood and took up the green one again. "Baby's got such yellow hair," she continued, "I don't know, after all, but the green will be prettiest. She will look just like a spring jonquille peeping through its green leaves." And she laughed at her own conceit, as she handed the hood to Mrs. Down to be bundled up.

Mrs. Down's mouth relaxed a very little for about a quarter of an instant, and then it settled back to its accustomed droop.

"There's rent-day coming too," she murmured, faintly.

"Well, of course," answered her customer, in her cheeriest way, "you must expect that. You mustn't let that cast you down."

"But how can I help it," said Mrs. Down, "when I haven't got the money to pay it?" and her voice sunk to a whisper, for the young woman behind the glass jars opposite was looking towards her.

Miss Riggs lifted up both of her dots of hands. "Do tell!" exclaimed she, also in a whisper. "Is it possible it is so bad as that?"

Mrs. Down nodded in a heart-broken way, and leaning still farther over the counter, whispered, "I haven't saved up a cent towards it. And it's day after to-morrow."

"Dear! what *is* to be done? How much is it?"

"Thirty dollars."

"O, if I were only rich, I would pay it for you. I don't know — perhaps, as it is, I might do something."

"No, Miss Riggs," said Mrs. Down, in a firm tone of resignation. "I couldn't think of such a thing for a minute. After all you've done for us, too! Your trade has carried on the store, as you might say. No, let the worst come. I can't take your money, with no chance to pay it back."

"But how do you know there will be no chance? Business may be better soon."

"No, you're very kind to say so; but I've lost all hopes of anything's being better for me in this world. I've battled for bread for my children, but now I shall give up. There is no use in trying any longer. I'm ready to take whatever comes; and if we all starve together, I shall be contented, if we are only buried in the same grave."

"Tut, tut!" cried Miss Riggs; "you're all in the dumps. You don't look on the bright side of things at all. What would the world come to if everybody talked like you?"

"Everybody don't have such trials," sighed Mrs. Down, sadly.

"But a great many do. And some have a great deal worse. Just think what happened to us three years ago. Not that I want to brag, either; but supposing I had given up, and talked as you do, where would poor brother James, and Baby and her mother, and all of us, have been?"

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Down, meekly; "but it don't alter my case. I shall sit still and let things go as they will. I trust I shall have patience to bear all my afflictions."

In this very resigned frame of mind Miss Riggs was finally obliged to leave her.

Rent-day came, and with it Squire Peters, the landlord. The squire was a little, round, fat, rosy-cheeked man, whose hair had once been of rather a fiery hue; but time had toned it down to a reddish brown, and thickly sprinkled it with gray. He invariably carried a gold-headed cane, and was rather pompous-spoken.

"Good morning, madam," said he to Mrs. Down, with one of his old-fashioned bows; "I presume that you have not forgotten that the quarter is up to-day?"

"No, I haven't forgotten," answered Mrs. Down.

"This is the bill, I believe," remarked he, drawing forth a long, narrow strip of paper, and laying it upon the counter. "Just thirty dollars; very easy terms for these times — very easy terms."

"It might as well be thirty thousand dollars as thirty," gasped his debtor, glancing at the amount on the bill, and then carrying her handkerchief up to her eyes. "I'm a poor lone widow, Squire Peters, with four young children and fatherless, and with not a cent in the world."

"But you do not mean — is it possible that you cannot pay your rent?" exclaimed the squire, rather staggered at the sighs and tears.

"Everything has gone against me," went on the widow, in a gentle wail. "I'm sure

I don't know why. There's the other pin and needle store making money like smoke, and I can't scrape enough to live. It's hard to be put upon so."

"I do not wish to be hard upon you," said the squire, who had the name of being close-fisted. "I am willing to wait a few days, or even a few weeks."

"It will do no good. I shall not have the money then any more than now."

"Very well, madam," exclaimed the squire, testily, restoring the bill to his breast-pocket, "if you do not intend to pay the rent, you will please to vacate the premises at once. You may think yourself lucky that I do not seize upon your goods for payment."

Mrs. Down sat in her chair like Patience on a monument. "This is a hard world to live in," she groaned; and then she added, recklessly, "The rich are always so ready to grind the faces of the poor."

"What!" shouted the squire, his temper rising like mercury in a thermometer. "You cheat me out of my money, and then insult

me! The quicker you and your traps are out of this the better. I was a donkey to let you the store at all. Haven't I lived within a stone's throw of you this twenty years? And don't I know you and yours for the most shiftless, lazy, idle set in all creation?"

"Squire Peters," said Mrs. Down, drawing herself up, "I had made up my mind to go out of your store peaceably; but now I won't. I'll stay here till I'm carried out by force. I was going from here to the almshouse. I'd as lief go to the jail. O, Becky! O, Solomon! O, Jacob! O, David! the very worst is come."

Mrs. Down made good her word, and staid in the store, much to the exasperation of the squire, who could not get her out, even with the lever of the law, under a notice of two weeks.

At the end of that time arrived the officers, and in sonorous tones commanded the offending party to leave.

"Squeakety-squeak," creaked Mrs. Down's

rocking-chair, and the lady herself tilted backwards and forwards, with her hands folded in her lap, braving it out to the last.

"Whew!" said one officer to the other, in an undertone, regarding with dismay the gigantic proportions of the matron before him; "we shall have a lug of it, if we have to carry her out."

"I have my doubts as to our doing it at all," answered the other.

"Pitch out the duds first," cried the squire, glowing with anger, and flying from one end of the store to the other, like a wild animal in a menagerie cage.

The cases were emptied, the window was rifled and dismantled, the shelves were swept clear. Everything was piled pell-mell in a heap upon the sidewalk. The crowd outside gave a delighted huzza at every fresh deposit to the motley pile.

The crowd inside, too, jeered, and laughed, and hooted, and enjoyed the fun amazingly. It was not more than once in a lifetime that such an entertainment, free, gratis, for nothing, too, was afforded them.

And all the time the little dumpy rocking-chair kept up its placid "squeakety-squeak," and Mrs. Down's countenance remained as unmoved as ever.

Everything at last was taken out of the store but the rocking-chair and its occupant. The officers hesitated, and whispered together; the noisy clamor all around was hushed; there were a few moments of breathless expectation.

"I suppose we must make a trial of it, sir," said one of them to Squire Peters.

"Yes, yes, of course," answered the squire, eying his antagonist rather nervously, and keeping on the lee side of the enforcers of the law.

"See! she's bracing herself," said the man. "I'm afraid she'll be too much for us."

All at once, just as the two officers took a step forward, before the breathless lull all around was broken, a voice was heard, eager, passionate, commanding.

"Let me through!" it said. "I want to get to my mother. You must make way for *me. I will* see her."

The next minute Becky had pushed herself forward into the open space just in front of the little rocking-chair.

Her brown hair was flying, her gray eyes steel-blue with excitement, her whole frame quivering.

"Do not touch her!" she cried to the officers, who now stood one on each side of Mrs. Down. "She is sick; she is not quite right here," putting her hand to her head. "See how strangely she is looking."

The crowd tiptoed more than ever. The two men bent forward and gazed into Mrs. Down's face. It was as Becky said — she did look strangely. There seemed to be a film over her eyes, which were set and stony, and her face was colorless and rigid.

"Mother, don't you know me?" sobbed Becky, throwing her arms about her, and laying her cheek to hers. "Dear mother, come home," and she took her by the hand.

To the astonishment of all, Mrs. Down arose, and, led by Becky, walked through the crowd, that opened to the right and to

the left and made a broad aisle for her passage through.

Her filmy eyes were wide open, but she did not seem to see any one; she looked as though she were walking in her sleep. And so Becky took her home.

CHAPTER XI.

UPSIDE DOWN.

SOME persons are not calculated to bear trouble. It blasts and blights them as frost does the flowers. Now, though Mrs. Down could not be compared to anything more delicate in the vegetable line than a cauliflower, or in health to a full-blown peony, yet she drooped as desperately as a wild-wood anemone or a fine-strung hare-bell under the chilling winds of adversity.

"What a pity," said her neighbors, "that there's no backbone nor gumption to her!"

So it was a pity! And since, from her childhood up, she had never possessed either of these go-ahead qualities, she was more to be pitied than blamed.

Becky did not blame her. She never thought of such a thing; but after she

brought her home, she bathed her head, and undressed her, and watched beside her with tearful eyes and swelling heart, till the stony, meaningless look died out of her face, and she awoke as from a trance.

"You here, Becky?" she said, in a bewildered way. "What day is it? Why didn't you wake me up before?"

The tall eight-day clock in the next room hammered out twelve strokes.

"So late!" murmured Mrs. Down. "How come I to oversleep myself? And — why, to-day the officers are coming. I must go to the store. Didn't I tell Squire Peters I wouldn't leave till I was put out by force?"

She made an effort to rise; but Becky tried to prevent her.

"Do not get up, mother," she cried, imploringly; "you are not able. Let the store go."

"I don't know as it matters much," said her mother, sinking back wearily upon her pillows; "and my head feels so queer!"

Not a single thing of what had happened

at the store did she remember. She had had a species of cataleptic trance or fit, which had stupefied and dulled her senses to all that had gone on about her. The distress of mind she had been laboring under of late was probably the cause.

This attack weakened and prostrated her for a fortnight. During this time Becky matured her plans.

"Mother," said she one day, coming out of a brown study, "you and the boys have tried your hand at it, and now I'm going to take my chance."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Down.

"I'm going to work the farm," was the reply.

"Work the farm!" repeated her mother, almost too much astonished for speech.

"Why not?" said Becky. "See what a lots of money Farmer Yates makes. I heard him say once that he began with nothing bigger than a potato-patch."

"But Farmer Yates and you are two different folks. I wouldn't try it."

The despondent tone was enough to discourage any one. But Becky's voice was as bright and hopeful as ever, as she said, pointing out the window, "Just look at all the land we've got. I told Miss Riggs about it, and she said it was the very best thing to be done, and that she'd help me all she could."

"What help'll she be, farming, I'd like to know?"

"Well, she wouldn't be much at hoeing, or weeding, or digging potatoes;" and Becky laughed outright at the idea; "but there's other ways of helping. She's going up to Cherry Farm with me to-night to help me make a bargain with Farmer Yates, and to see about ploughing and planting."

"You talk," exclaimed her mother, "as though you had got things all cut and dried."

"So I have, almost. I've been thinking and thinking it over this ever so long. I believe I must have been made for farming, I'm so big, and strong, and full of bones.

Why, when I hold my arm out straight, so, Sol can't begin to bend it."

She bared her arm to the elbow, and stretched it out, holding it so tense and firm that every bone in her clinched and muscular hand showed plainly, and the big veins in her arm stood out like whip-cords.

"I declare you've given me a turn," said her mother, and she actually grew pale.

"Why, what have I done!" exclaimed Becky, rolling down her sleeve hastily.

"I don't believe in ghosts, you know; but it did seem just now as if I could see your father standing beside you, and calling you his 'little Upside Down,' just as he used to when you were a baby."

"Upside Down? What did he ever call me that for?" inquired Becky, curiously.

"You were such an odd one, and always up to some quirk that no other baby would have thought of. You were always turning everything inside out and upside down when you were no bigger than my thumb. It used to tickle your father almost to pieces."

Becky smiled, and fell to thinking again. And as her mother watched her, and caught the kindling of her eye and the flush that stole slowly over her cheek, she became dimly conscious that there was a piece of leaven working within the child that neither she — her own mother — nor her brothers possessed.

She said no more against Becky's plans; and in the evening, after supper, Becky set out on her mission to Cherry Farm.

She called for Miss Riggs on the way, and had a game of romps with Baby in the entry, while she waited for her friend to put on her bonnet. Down by the garden gate they met a man carrying a paint pot in his hand. He walked with a crutch, and one leg was twisted round so that it dragged upon the ground. His face was pale, and his eyes sunken with long suffering, but he nodded and smiled pleasantly at the two, as they passed.

This was "poor James," as Miss Riggs always spoke of him. He was Miss Riggs's

brother, and Baby's father. He was a house painter by trade; but three years before he had fallen from a high staging and become crippled for life.

This sad accident was a heavy blow to the Riggs family. For James was a young man just starting in business, and was straining every nerve to meet the yearly payments on the pretty little cottage, — the same which he now lived in, — which in time would make it his own.

All his hopes seemed now, however, to be brought to a stand-still; for after a long and lingering illness he recovered the use of his limbs only partially. He was able to drag himself painfully about with the aid of crutches, and this was all he could ever expect to do.

I do not know what would have become of them all had it not been for little Miss Riggs. Her brother had always provided for her till now, and she had never done anything harder in her life than tend the flowers in the garden, and help take care of

Baby, who was then the weest tot in the world. She was almost as much of a baby — so everybody thought — as the real Baby herself. But she tucked her curls behind her ears, and in her chirping way told "poor, dear brother James" not to fret about anything, since she was going to be a dressmaker. She went as apprentice, three months, and then set up business for herself. And as she did her best to please everybody, and was so full of kindness, and sympathy, and sunshine, she made out wonderfully well, and had enough work to keep her brother James's wife sewing for her all the time. What the two earned came to a snug little sum; and so even "poor James" grew at last happy and contented.

Such a one as she was the best friend Becky could have. We will skip over all the encouraging things she said to Becky, as they walked to Cherry Farm, and come to the important conversation that was held with Mr. Yates, across the wooden bars of the cow-yard.

There they had found him, with both elbows and his back leaning against the top bar, surveying with pleasure his herd of cattle crowding around the trough to drink.

"Good evening, Mr. Yates," said Miss Riggs's sprightly voice.

Upon that the farmer faced his visitors.

"I thought it was one of my pigeons cooing," he exclaimed, as he gave Miss Riggs's hand a hearty shake; and he looked down at the little woman, on the other side of the bars, very pleasantly indeed. To tell the truth, she was a great favorite of his.

Miss Riggs — cunning little manager that she was — smiled her sweetest.

"You see," said she, "we — that is, Becky and I — have come up on a little business. We — that is, Becky is thinking of carrying on a farm; and we — I mean Becky wants some advice, and a little help, perhaps. And so I brought her right up to you."

"Ya-as," responded the farmer to this

neat little speech, lifting one of his hob-nailed shoes to the lowest bar, and scratching his stubbly chin very slowly with his forefinger.

"I don't know much about working on a farm," spoke up Becky, "but I want to try it. I think I could raise peas, and beans, and corn, and potatoes, and make enough on it to keep mother and the boys out of the almshouse. I've got the will and the power to work in me, if only somebody will show me how to begin."

When Becky had finished, Mr. Yates had stopped scratching his chin, and both his eyes were opened to their widest extent.

"And so you're Becky Down — air you?" he asked, favoring her with a long stare. "Let's hear what you expect me to do fur yer. Let's come to the pint."

"I want a man and a yoke of oxen to plough," answered she, readily, as if she had made up her mind beforehand as to just what she should say; "and then I want the things to plant."

"H'm," remarked the sturdy farmer, dryly; "you hain't got any money, I s'pose, to pay for them oxen and things?"

"No; but you shall have the hay off the three-acre lot. Won't that pay?"

"Mebbe, if it happened so as 'twas a fust-rate hayin' season."

"Miss Riggs told me she was sure you would take your pay that way," said Becky, her face showing her disappointment. "It is all I can do, unless,"—a new idea striking her,—"unless I make more than enough money to live on; and then I'll pay you besides."

"It won't do to count your chickens 'fore they're hatched. That's a poor business. It'll be a long step to your profits any way. Have yer thought of that? Ain't yer afraid of blisterin' yer hands hoein' round the corn, or lamin' yer back pullin' weeds, or gettin' yer blood het up, and havin' sunstroke, in the July dog-days?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, Mr. Yates, except not getting the chance to work. If

you will only help me, I know I shall be able to pay you. I'm a great deal stouter and larger than most boys at my age, and I will try so hard!" Her fervor started the tears in her eyes.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Mr. Yates; "don't go to havin' a tantrum. That ere hay on the three-acre lot'll be a good bargain, ef it's any kind of a season. And ef it's an extra crop, I'll make it square."

Becky's eyes shone like stars, and little Miss Riggs squeezed the great hairy hand hanging over the bar, crying with a gush, "I knew you'd do it. I knew it."

"It's time your ploughin' was done," resumed the farmer. "I'll send over a man to-morrow, ef it's pleasant. Two or three acres'll do you — won't it?"

"O, no. I shall plant as many as four, or five, or six."

"Don't go it too strong," said Mr. Yates, looking at Becky approvingly. "You've got the right snap to you, and ef you only hold out to the end, it'll pay."

"I shan't give up," declared Becky.

"Mercy! how late it's getting! It's almost dark!" exclaimed Miss Riggs. "Come, child — aren't you most ready to go?"

"Yes," answered Becky. "I'm all ready."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Yates. "I'm going to give you somethin' to carry home."

He hurried into the barn, and in a few minutes reappeared with a basket under his arm. There was a terrible squealing heard at the same time.

"Here," said he, giving the basket, with its closely-tied cover, into Becky's hand; "there's the fattest little pig out of the whole litter. Three weeks old to a day. Jest take care of it, and feed it well, and by next Thanksgiving it'll be worth a little fortin' to you."

Becky, though rather surprised at this unlooked-for gift, thanked Mr. Yates most gratefully.

"Never mind that," said he, cutting her short. "I've took a shine to you. I like yer grit. Grit's what puts yer through.

An' you'll find me a fast stand-by jest so long as you hold on to it."

Becky walked home with Miss Riggs, and felt as if treading on air; and piggy kindly serenaded their lonely way with the "Prison Song," set to music of his own composing, and various other selections from all the latest operas — uproars is what I meant to say. He was as good as a whole brass band — base viol, first and second fiddle, clarinet and all.

CHAPTER XII.

WORKING THE FARM.

THE robins were back in their old haunts again. They had built their nests in the tall elms in front of the house, and in the old apple-tree whose gnarled and twisted branches rested against Becky's chamber window. The young corn had sprouted, the grass was an emerald green. Spring had come, with its immortal youth, its flood of sunshine, its quickening pulses.

All nature was astir. Becky felt it in her inmost soul, as she stood at the garden gate in the early gray of the morning, with the twitter of the birds filling the air around her. On the ground at her feet was a basket, filled with bunches of radishes, and long speckled stalks of rhubarb, and heads of young lettuce drenched with dew.

FARMER BECKY. — Page 137.

She had an expectant air, as if waiting for somebody. Occasionally she glanced with pride at the well-filled basket before her, for here were displayed the first fruits of her toil. Farmer Yates was to take them to market for her. She was listening now for the rumble of his wagon.

Becky's hard labor and exposure to the wind and sun, even for so short a time, had begun to tell upon her. Her face was tanned and freckled, and her hands — never a lily-white — were now grown coarse and frightfully rough, and just at present (from recent gathering of her vegetable treasures) were streaked and daubed with garden mould.

Her dress (my girl readers mustn't be shocked) consisted of jacket and pants. The pants were tucked into a pair of stout cowhide boots. The adoption of this costume, for her working-dress, was a mark of good sense; for what would have been more ridiculous than petticoats and white stockings out in the fields amongst the dirt? The garments were some of Solomon's cast-off

ones, and were not the best of fits, since he was short and fat, and Becky tall and lean. However, that did not much matter.

"Becky Down in boy's clothes — I never!" said everybody, with an exclamation point, in the first of it; and the idea that the Down blood was tainted with craziness grew stronger for a while than ever.

But Mr. Yates's steady patronage routed this notion, and Becky's own perseverance and dauntless energy forced folks finally into regarding her as "a natural curiosity," a "*rara avis*" (look in your dictionaries), a "white crow," or any other thing that is marvellous.

Somehow, the story of her babyish oddities leaked out, and she was dubbed forthwith by the name her father had, in sport, given her — that of "Upside Down."

Even Mr. Yates relished the joke, and adopted the name. As to Becky herself, she was too full of her great idea of carrying on the farm, and too much engrossed in her work, to care what folks did call her.

And now the well-known market wagon, drawn by its brisk-trotting pair of iron-grays, is in sight down the road.

"Ha!" exclaimed the farmer, drawing in his reins taut, and bringing his span to a stand-still, just opposite the waiting figure at the gate; "on hand — air you? I'm a leetle belated this mornin'. Didn't know but I'd ketch you nappin', though."

"I was up by candle-light," answered Becky, lifting her basket and walking towards the wagon. "It was almost dark when I went after these."

"Them *air* beauties, and no mistake," says the farmer, looking admiringly at the crisp rosy radishes, with their green leaves, and the dewy lettuce, with centres blanched white as snow. "There ain't a thing in my whole wagon that'll beat 'em."

Becky looks well pleased at this praise. He swings the basket into the back of the wagon, turns to say, "I'll stop as I come back," chirrups to his horses, and drives away.

Becky has seen hard days since she had that talk with Mr. Yates, over the cow-yard bars. Her hands *have* got blistered, and her back lame, as he hinted then to her; some days everything has gone wrong; the boys have had headaches, her mother has fretted, she has been on the point of giving up in a passion of tears; but this one draught of the elixir of success repays her a hundred fold.

She glances at the stretch of brown ploughed land on either side. She looks with pride towards her hot-beds. These last are specimens of her own carpentering, covered over with old windows.

Finally, she enters the house, all-glowing. Nobody is up but herself. She does not expect it, for it is just four by the clock. She nods at the old dial-plate, yellow with age, as much as to say, "I've taken you by the forelock to-day, Mr. Time;" and, as if minutes are very precious to her, she passes out again, through the wood-shed, only stopping long enough to arm herself

with a hoe, which she selects from a number standing in the corner.

She takes the stone wall with a leap, and draws a long breath at sight of the work that lies before her. She is in the potato-field, which covers nearly an acre. And O, the weeds! Becky thinks they must have sprung up like magic in the night. Certainly, yesterday there were not a hundredth part as many.

But she attacks them with her hoe most bravely. It is a pleasure to see her work, she does it so swiftly, so neatly, so steadily. Any fair day, if you should pass along at this same time in the morning, you would find this unwearied laborer bending patiently to her toil. It is the very best three hours of all the twenty-four to make headway — so Becky says. Between whiles she whistles. This is not at all the thing, one knows, for a girl; but it matches well with the jacket and pants, and Becky whistles like a bird. It comes natural to her; and why, just because she has the misfortune to be a girl,

should she be called upon to bury this talent?

Becky, though she does not appear to take her eyes once off her work, enjoys thoroughly the grand transformation scene going on around her.

The gray clouds turn into pink and blue. Then they become luminous. A golden light appears behind them. They put you in mind of sheets of tissue paper afloat in the air. The arrows of the sun shoot through, and the east is on fire. Broader and broader pours the dazzling day, and the perspiration stands thick upon Becky's forehead. But she only pushes her coarse straw hat farther back from her face, and hoes the weeds and hills the potatoes as zealously as ever.

"Hee-ur — hur-r-r' up — hot cakes — breakfast!"

This rather mixed-up sentence comes from Solomon. He is hanging out the kitchen window, bawling through his hands.

"Comin'," shouts Becky, in answer; and he disappears like a flash.

Hot cakes are a magnet to Solomon and his two brothers. The attraction of the compass's needle to the polar star is nothing to it.

Becky shoulders her hoe and starts for the house. She goes a little out of her way to look at the corn. It is just springing up. It was the last thing planted. In the middle of the lot she finds half a dozen of the tender sprouts uprooted and wilting in the sun.

"Caw, caw, caw!" cry the hoarse voices of the crows from an adjoining field.

"I'll fix you for stealing my corn, you black thieves," mutters Becky, menacingly.

The cunning rascals have been pulling up the sprouts with their bills to get at the kernel underground.

"We must have a scarecrow out in the cornfield," remarks Becky, as she takes her seat at the breakfast table.

"Lemme make one. I can do it tip-top," says Jacob, who is enveloped in a cloud of steam arising from the stack of hot cakes in the plate before him.

"Well," answers Becky, "only don't be too long about it. We've all got to work sharp to-day on those potatoes."

"I'm going to nail up that hole in the pig-pen first, anyway," exclaims Solomon.

"I thought you did that yesterday. I'm sure I left you hunting up the hammer and nails."

"The hammer was over to Tad Bean's. I didn't think of it till I'd been a looking for half an hour. I lent it to him last week. I went over after it; but he was shingling his barn, and I didn't like to ask him for it."

"And you came off without it—did you?" asks Becky, not appreciating at all Solomon's delicacy. "How are you going to fix up the pig-pen, then? I'd like to know."

"O, I stopped into Mr. Grayson's as I came 'long back, and borrowed his. There's more ways than one to kill a cat." Solomon's tone is triumphant.

"You eat like a bird," Becky's mother says to her, for though the last to sit down to the table, she is the first to rise from it.

"I've had all I want," replies Becky, whose appetite, in spite of her hard work, is not one tithe of that of her lazy, shirking brothers.

She picks up her straw hat, and takes her hoe, which she has left standing against the wall, by the door, saying, at the same time, to David, "There ain't nothing to hinder you from coming out as soon as you've eaten your breakfast."

"O, dear," groans David. "How you do drive a feller! I don't feel very well this morning. I've got a blister right in the joint of my little finger."

"Pooh! I've got dozens of blisters all over my hands," answers his sister.

"Davy, do as she tells you," urges his mother, gently. She has come to look upon Becky as the head of the house. She can hardly make a batch of bread without consulting her.

"Well," says David, "it ain't fair to put me to work at hoein' taters before the other boys. I'll come out when they do. I've got

to have my finger done up in a rag and mutton taller."

So Becky trudged off alone, with a half sigh. "If the boys would only take hold a little better," she thought, "how nice we could get along!"

However, she did not let this dishearten her long. It was a drawback she was used to. She had settled it with herself some time ago, that her own extra exertions must make up for the lack of industry and energy around her. She was the one busy bee in the home hive; the rest were drones.

It was full an hour before her solitary labor was interrupted. Then she heard the voices and laughter of the boys. They clambered over the wall behind her; but she did not look up till David called out, "Becky! j-just s-s-see." He was in such a giggle that he could hardly stammer out the words.

Solomon was not able to speak at all. He was bent nearly double. Jacob was almost hid behind the ridiculous figure which he bore aloft in triumph. This figure was

nothing less than the scarecrow. The top of it was a hat. And such a hat! Perhaps, if any of your mothers have kept any of your great great-grandfather's Sunday clothes, you may have seen one like it. It was white beaver, rusty and napless, rather narrow brimmed, and full two feet high, flaring out towards the top like a tunnel. There was a strip of crape tied about it, with long ends dangling behind. Under it was a mouth, ferociously marked with lampblack, into which was thrust an old clay pipe. This gave you the idea that the rest of the face was hidden by the hat, which had slipped down over it in this ludicrous way. As for the rest, the figure had on a claw-hammered bottle-green coat with brass buttons, and a pair of nankeen pantaloons.

"What do you think of it?" asked Jacob, lowering it to the ground. "I made it on a broomstick, and stuffed it with straw. I found the clothes up in the garret."

Becky was laughing heartily. "I guess it'll scare the crows," said she; "but what

did you bring it here for? Why didn't you set it up in the cornfield?"

"I wanted to show it to you first," answered Jacob, who was justly proud of his achievement.

"I've been over to Tad Bean's with it. He thought it was first rate. I'll go set it up now, this very minute."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when Solomon shouted, "The pig, the pig! He's in the beets."

Jacob, with a "whoop, whoop, hoorah boys," tossed down his scarecrow all in a heap, and chased after Solomon. David followed suit, and Becky, with a gesture of despair, dropped her hoe, and ran with the rest.

Piggy, now grown into a respectable sized porker, did not relish being deprived of his liberty and his juicy feast. He proved himself a hard customer. He doubled and twisted on his pursuers, kicked up his heels right under their noses, and slipped through their fingers as though he were the traditional greased pig of masonic history.

Finally, however, Becky caught him by his stump of a tail, and held him, in spite of his squealings and squirmings. Solomon and Jacob sprang for his head. Each hung on to an ear, and in this ignoble manner was the poor little swine hustled back to his pen.

"Why, how is this?" exclaimed Becky. "You haven't nailed the hole up. He has been gnawing it. There's where he got through."

"You see," said Solomon, not at all abashed, "I've been helping Jake on the scarecrow."

"Get me the hammer and nails," ordered Becky, mourning in secret over his carelessness and all this loss of time.

Solomon bestirred himself enough to bring her the required articles. There were plenty of loose pieces of board lying about the pen. As she picked up a piece of the proper size, she said, impatiently, "There's no need of your standing and watching me. There's nothing for you to do here."

"We'd just as lief wait for you as not," said Jacob, sitting on the top of the pig-pen and balancing his heels in the air. His brothers nodded their assent to his remark. But Becky did not seem overpleased with this burst of brotherly affection.

When she had nailed the board firmly, the four returned to the potato-lot. The scare-crow, from Jacob's having jerked it down so violently, was all apart.

"It is scared to pieces," said Jacob; and that was enough to set the giddy three in a giggle again.

Becky never smiled, but picked up her hoe with a very vexed face, and fell to work as if impelled by steam power.

Jacob sat down on the ground and put his man together again. The other two helped him; and when it was finally established in position in the cornfield, Solomon said, as he placed himself beside Becky, hoe in hand, "Now we'll all put in and make up for lost time."

When they were really at work, Becky's

face cleared. After all, they did do a good deal, and they couldn't help their fun-loving nature; so she reasoned.

Thus peace and harmony were restored, and the four worked along very pleasantly together until there was a rumble of wheels, and Mr. Yates's market wagon was seen coming up the road. Of course, then there was a stampede, and this time Becky headed it.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THEY TOIL NOT, NEITHER DO THEY SPIN."

MR. YATES had driven away, and Becky stood looking with delight at the crisp bill he had brought her in exchange for her basket of vegetables. She also held in her hand a letter. This was in itself an event.

"Open it: why don't you?" said Solomon, for it was directed, in an irregular, childish hand, to "Miss Becky Down."

Becky turned it over two or three times more, wondering who *could* have written to her, and then broke the seal.

This was the letter: —

"DEAR COUSIN BECKY: I have not forgotten you. I have thought of you a hundred times. I should like to see you. I

wanted to write before; but I have not had a chance. I should not dare now, if it wasn't for Danie Peters. You know Danie. She was at papa's funeral. Judge Peters is her father. He asks after you and your mother very often. Danie came over this afternoon, with her Berlin raised work, to see Caroline and me. But Caroline and mamma are gone away in the carriage, and so Danie and I are all alone. We came up into mamma's boudoir, and there was her desk open, and paper, and pens, and envelopes strewn all over it. It made me think how I would like to write to you, and I told Danie, and she said she was sure she should; and she is going to put my letter into the post-office for me. I have saved up all my spending-money for you. Danie has pinned it on the inside of the sheet, so that it will not get lost. She has promised not to tell Caroline or mamma. I do not think it is wrong not to tell them, for I am only doing like papa. I wish I could give you as much

money as he did; but I can't till I am grown up. Danie sends love, and so do I.

"Yours affectionately,

"COUSIN GERTY."

Was not that a nice letter? Becky thought so. The tears almost came into her eyes as she looked at the bank-notes Danie Peters had so carefully pinned to the paper. She remembered Danie. At her uncle's funeral, amongst all the people, while she could hardly breathe for awe and bewilderment, she had noticed Danie Peters clearly. She could see her now, just the way she held her proud little head, and her bright, flashing, black eyes. She had come in with her father, and instead of sitting down silently, the way everybody else had done, she had run over to Gerty and Caroline, who were sobbing bitterly, and kissed them. Becky had thought at the time how brave she must be, and wondered how she dared, when so many people were looking at her.

Becky was not permitted, however, to

enjoy her letter in peace. Her brothers, whose attention had been happily diverted from her the last five minutes by an exciting chase after a chipmunk down the road, now beset her with questions.

"Let's have a look," said Solomon.

"Where did it come from?" asked Jacob.

"Who wrote it?" queried David.

Becky delivered it up to them, and Solomon, clearing his throat, read it out loud. His voice was raised to the roof of his head, and the nasal twang he assumed was most horrible. He had read the Declaration of Independence, at the school exhibition the year before, in this same manner, and had been complimented highly by the trustees, who sat as umpires on the occasion, in leathern-seated arm-chairs on the platform.

"Berlin raised work?" broke in Jacob, with a blank look, catching the words out of Solomon's mouth: "what kind of work is that?"

Nobody knew. Becky said she believed Berlin was "the name of a city off some-

where;" but this did not throw much light on the subject.

After this interruption, Solomon read on to, "We came up into mamma's boudoir;" and here Jacob found more play for his inquiring mind.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "'Boudoir'! what does that mean?"

"O, that's in the spelling-book," said Solomon.

"But what does it mean?" persisted Jacob.

Solomon shook his head. This also was beyond the Down ken. The bank-bills, however, needed no explanation. Those were understood at sight. The boys gloated over them like greedy young kites, pawing them with their not over-clean fingers, and casting up the amount in their heads with great unction.

"I wouldn't mind if *my* spendin' money come to fifty dollars," said Jacob, throwing his head back, and winking at the sky: "wouldn't I kick up a dust with it? You bet!"

Fifty dollars was what Gerty had sent.

"Dear little thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Down, when the letter was brought to her. "Dear little Gerty! Her heart is as tender as a chicken's. Just like her father's, for all the world."

Her face fell a little when Becky said, "Mother, I shall send back the money. We can get along without it. Aunt Biddles would be angry if she knew it. And I can't take money, even from cousin Gerty, in secret."

"I don't know, I'm sure, where you got so much spirit," sighed her mother. "You didn't take it from me. I believe in getting along easy when you can; and this money would make things much more comfortable. But then I suppose you know best. You can do as you please."

The boys' dismay may be imagined; but for all that, Becky held fast to her determination. In the evening, after much laborious effort, the following was penned:—

"DEER CUZZEN GERTY: I thank you verry mutch. I am glad you have not forgot me. Butt I do not want the munney. Your mother wood not be willing, I no. You will not kare, I hope. And I do not kneed it. We have had a hard time this winter. Butt I am working the farm this spring. I begun to send reddishes and lettis to market this mourning out off my hot-beds. I have planted an aker of pertaters, and lots of korn, and unyuns, and kabbidge. Mr. Yates sez I can make enuff on my kropps to keep us threw the winter, besides paing up my detts. I shall send this letter to Danie Peters, and tell her to give it to you. I have got a kard her father gave to my mother, with his naim on it, and ware he lived. He asked us to cum and see him, if we cum to the citty agen. I thot you wood not want your mother to no about the munney.

"I send my luv to Danie Peters. Pleese except the saim four yorself.

"With mutch affeckshun,

"YOR CUZZEN BECKY."

It will be readily seen that Becky's schooling was not of the highest order. She had attended school in the same shilly-shally way as her brothers, about one day in five, during term-time, and sometimes not as often as that.

She laid down her pen, after her task was finished, with a long breath of relief. "I'd rather work out all day in the fields than do that over again," said she. "Writin' comes awful hard to me. I have to keep my tongue up in the roof of my mouth, and cant my head on one side, and my fingers get all cramped up, holding on to the pen so tight."

"I'm glad of it," mumbled Solomon, groutily, who sat all in a lump on the opposite side of the table, scowling at Becky's sheet of foolscap.

"Stick your tongue out next time," said the more magnanimous Jacob. "I can write a good deal easier when I do. It'll keep you from runnin' all up hill too."

So the letter, with the money enclosed,

was signed, sealed, and delivered, and in due time arrived at its place of destination — the palatial house of Judge Peters.

All letters that came by the morning mail were placed upon the hall table, where the family could see them as they passed down to breakfast. Becky's was laid there, along with half a dozen others, and Danie eyed it curiously, as she took it up, and danced into the breakfast-room, with it in her hand.

It was nothing unusual for Miss Danie Peters, the judge's only daughter and heiress, to have letters. Sometimes she had showers of billets-doux, rose-tinted, sweet-scented, written on the darlingest creamy-satined French paper that ever was, with beautifully-painted initials at the top, gilt-edged and gold-sealed. But this square, uncouth, saffron-colored envelope, stuck down with a big red wafer, *was* something out of the common way to Danie.

"Who do you suppose that's from, pa?" cried she, merrily, holding it up to her

father, who came into the room, in his dressing-gown and slippers, a minute or two later.

"How should I know, pet?" said the judge, stooping over to kiss her.

"Look!" exclaimed she, drawing the clumsily-folded sheet from out the envelope.

It was with difficulty that her father made out this line, written on the back of the folded sheet. It ran in this wise: "Danie Peters, pleese to give this to Gerty Biddles, from her cuzzen, Becky Down."

"Well," said he, after mastering the pot-hooky characters, "I think I know Danie Peters and Gerty Biddles, but who is Miss Becky Down."

"Just as if you didn't know! And you've spoken of her dozens of times." Danie was the picture of incredulous astonishment.

"Becky Down! Becky Down!" repeated the judge; "O, ah! yes! it's Mr. Biddles's niece, eh?" The fact was, he had been pondering upon some knotty law question, and the name had slipped his memory.

"Isn't it horrid writing?" asked Danie, scanning the line critically.

"Not an Italian hand, certainly; but you young ladies that live in the city have the advantage. The schools in the country are not very good, and not much of them, unless things have changed wonderfully since I was a boy."

"O, father, I've a good mind to tell you something."

"Well."

"But you must promise never, *never* to tell."

"Is it a state secret?"

"It's something Gerty Biddles told me;" and then Danie perched herself upon her father's knee, and gave the sum and substance of what Gerty had told her, ending with, "And isn't it a shame, pa, that Mrs. Biddles is so mean with her money?—so much as she has got too."

"Why, no, my dear, she isn't mean. She gave a hundred dollars the other day towards the new church clock."

"But she lets her own relations starve."

"Not so bad as that. You say they have the farm rent free."

"But they can't eat the farm—can they?" cried Danie, triumphantly. "Where's their money to get bread, and meat, and victuals."

"They must work, and make money," answered her father; and then Danie put her hand over his mouth, and said, "Hush-h-h," for her mother was entering the room.

Several times, during the day, Judge Peters thought of what Danie had told him. He knew that Mr. Biddles, while he lived, had supported his widowed sister and her family. He knew also that he had died without making a will.

"He meant to have made her independent," he thought to himself. "He has spoken of it to me several times. Surely his wife must have known his intentions. It is strange if she has made no provision for them. I cannot believe it."

In the evening, Danie had a birth-night party. "Only a few very select friends,"

Mrs. Judge Peters had said to Mrs. Biddles.

"The children have not been anywhere since their father died," objected Mrs. Biddles.

"But there can be no harm in their coming to *our* house, so intimate as they are with Danie;" and Mrs. Judge finally carried the day, and Caroline and Gerty went.

For this one night they took off their black, and wore white, with necklaces and bracelets of pearls. Their dresses and ornaments were the most elegant and expensive there. They put quite in the shade Danie's mull muslin, and tasty sash, and shoulder-knots.

Mrs. Peters, though her means were as ample as Mrs. Biddle's, did not believe in an unlimited outlay for dress, either for herself or Danie.

Early in the evening Danie had stolen into the study, where the judge sat engrossed over his books.

"This is the funniest letter in the world,"

said she, "and Gerty says you may read it," and she gave him Becky's letter, with the money pinned inside, just as it had been sent.

An hour or two later, the judge was in the drawing-room, watching the gay scene going on before him. The children were dancing. Their tiny slippered feet were tripping lightly backward and forward; their cheeks were softly flushed with pleasure and excitement; their merry laughter rippled out between the pauses of the music; and the soft sheen of the dresses, the flowers and floating ribbons with which they were wreathed and trimmed, displayed the grace and beauty of their childish wearers to the utmost.

The judge's wife pointed out Caroline and Gerty Biddles. "They are more expensively dressed than any of the others, as usual," said she. "They do look beautifully tonight, though. They put me in mind of lilies — all in white, so."

Lilies! With Becky's letter fresh in his

memory, the judge caught at the word, and into his mind floated this passage of Scripture, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin."

Ah, Becky! Becky! sore and weary with your hard day's labor, fast asleep in your little bare chamber, you know nothing of the thrill of sympathy and indignation your letter has given to the aristocratic Judge Peters.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW FRIENDS.

RICH folks can keep themselves warm in winter and cool in summer. It is the greatest of blessings to be able to be comfortable. The Peterses were happily of this class.

When the June sun began to scorch through silk umbrellas and parasols, and the pavements were hot enough to be sensibly felt by all feet shod with single-soled boots, Danie's mother packed her trunks for a summer's trip to the mountains. The furniture and pictures were encased in brown Holland, the silver sent to the bank to be locked up with the judge's bags of money, and the housekeeper vested with supreme power over the other servants.

All this being done, the carriage was

driven to the door at seven A. M. one fine day, and Danie, in a fresh linen suit, with a bag, and a shawl, and a book, and a reticule; Danie's mother, also in a fresh linen suit, with a luncheon-box, and a green veil, and a water-proof cape; and Danie's father in suit of linen, No. 3, with an umbrella, and a gun, and a disjointed fishing-rod, and an overcoat, and newspapers bulging out of all his pockets, — and all as clumsy as elephants with so much luggage, — crammed themselves smilingly through the carriage-door, too narrow by half, and away they went to the depot. The trunks were strapped to the rack outside.

They were no more than settled in the cars, when the bell rang, and they were fairly started on their journey.

At first Danie was very chatty, but by degrees she silenced down; her mother masked herself in her green veil and went to sleep, and her father buried himself behind his newspapers.

The cars stopped at a way station fifteen

minutes for dinner; but Danie's mother said it was too much trouble to get out, and so the judge brought them some very mustardy sandwiches, and some mince pie that appeared to have been spiced with pepper, and salt, and vinegar. Nothing else was to be had. To obtain this the judge had fought desperately; for, the time being short, the scramble and elbow-digging was immense.

A man is never so savage as when his stomach is empty.

Mrs. Peters and Danie preferred hunger to the refreshments set before them. This they partially allayed along the route by patronizing the small boys, who, from time to time, sprung up, as it were, out of the very floor of the car itself, with baskets of pop-corn, and sandy sponge-drops, and trays of Jessop's candy done up in five cent sticks, with casings of brown paper.

Towards the close of the afternoon, the judge, who had been looking at the map in his guide-book, said, "I've a good mind to go out of my way, some twenty or thirty

miles or so, just to hunt up that niece of Jeremiah Biddles."

"O, do!" exclaimed Danie.

"It would be a curiosity to see a child of twelve carrying on a farm, certainly," remarked Mrs. Peters, who had been let into the secret.

"It would take us a day longer," said the judge.

"That does not matter. Our time is our own."

So it was finally decided to pay Becky and her mother a visit.

Rather fagged out with their day's ride, our travellers soon after alighted at the little village, where they intended to spend the night. They were but half way to their place of destination, and the new arrangement stretched out their journey to a three days' length.

Bright and early the next morning they were on the start again. The landlord of the hotel, where they had stopped, provided them with a very comfortable, light wagon,

and driver. The trunks followed behind in another vehicle.

Danie enjoyed the ride very much, and her mother frequently exclaimed at the beauty of the scenery as they passed along.

"I really do not know but I had rather spend my summer here in one of these beautiful country towns than to go on to the mountains," said Mrs. Peters.

Danie was thirsty, and they stopped at a farm-house, the very picture of comfort, with a clover-field in front, where the driver told them they could get "the tallest kind of milk."

The farmer's wife herself, her gown tucked up and her sleeves rolled above her elbows, brought it out to them. Danie, as she drank, looked over the rim of her earthen mug, through the open door into the spacious kitchen, with its yellow-painted floor, and its broad, red-bricked hearth. On the doorstep sat a little girl, with a kitten in her lap. She was stringing clover-blossoms with a needle and thread.

"How I would like to stop in a house like that!" said Danie, as they drove away. "It would be a great deal nicer than being in a barn of a hotel."

The lakes and ponds interested the judge, who was an enthusiastic fisherman. They caught glimpses of several — some embowered in trees, others bordered with lily-pads.

"I should think there might be good fishing about here," said he, addressing himself to the driver.

"I tell yew!" answered the man, leaning forward and slapping the end of the reins gently upon the horses' backs. "It can't be beat."

"Any trouting?"

"Heaps!"

"I declare!" exclaimed the judge, laughingly, turning to his wife. "I am almost tempted to pitch my tent here, at least for a week or two. We should get to the mountains in good time then."

"Nothing I should like better," was the

reply. "The mountains are an old story. The only trouble is, that a week or two in one of these cosy farm-houses will be but an aggravation."

"Then we will stay longer. We will stay till we get tired." And he inquired of the driver if he knew of any good boarding-places about there.

There was no man, woman, or child, or even baby two months old, within a forty-mile circuit, but the driver seemed to have at his fingers' ends.

"There's any amount of places," was his answer to the judge's last question. "There's Deacon Simons; he sings in church through his nose. He's like old King Cole, a pious old soul. He wouldn't defraud a man out of a pin's wuth. And there's the widder Smith; her husband's dead this five year. She's devoted to his memory; she's some on butter and cheese. And then there's Cherry Farm; that knocks 'em all. That's the place for yew, squire; an' now I've hit it."

"Cherry Farm?" echoed the judge. "Where is that?"

"About five mile ahead. We're bound to within a mile of it."

"It must be near the Downs', then."

"I reckon," drawled the man, as he took a comprehensive glance behind him. "There's sunthin' a tearin' down the road. I thought I heerd it."

It was a heavy market team, drawn by a span of gray horses. They came dashing along at full speed.

"Good cattle," remarked the judge, who had turned around as his companion spoke.

"Ef you ain't in luck, squire!" ejaculated the driver, still scrutinizing the rapidly approaching team. "Here's the very man you want to see. It's Farmer Yates himself. He's the owner of Cherry Farm."

By this time the team had come alongside, and was about to pass them.

"Hillo!" shouted the driver, stretching himself out over the wheel of the wagon.

"How air ye? What's the news up your way?"

"That you, Gideon?" answered the stranger, slacking speed. "I wan't lookin' fur you up in these parts. All well to hum?"

"So, so. How's *your* folks?"

"Middlin'."

"Say, how'd you like to take some city boarders for a spell? I've jest been a-givin' you a recommend."

"Much obleeged to you, Gideon," said the burly farmer, with a twinkle of his eye. "I don't know as I keer about any. My woman's got her hands full, I reckon, without takin' boarders. Friends of yourn?"

"Only 'quaintances. Here they are, in the wagon — Squire Peters, and wife and little gal."

He designated the last two by jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "And now, squire," he added, in a lower tone, giving him a nudge, "you kin speak for yourself."

The judge was just returning the farmer's salutation of "Glad to see ye, glad to see ye,"

repeated three times, for the benefit of each of the three strangers Gideon had so elegantly introduced him to.

"I am happy to meet you, sir," said the judge. "We are on our way to the mountains. I am sorry you cannot accommodate us for a few weeks, for your rural scenery has so taken us captive, that we would like to explore the neighborhood at our leisure; though such was not our intention when we started."

"Travellin' for pleasure?"

"Yes, and profit, combined, I hope," answered the judge, with a smile.

"Seems to me you're gettin' to the mountains rayther roundabout."

"I came out of my way for the sake of visiting some friends — the sister of Jeremiah Biddles. Does she not live somewhere near you?"

"Jest half a mile, exact."

"Then you know her?"

"I guess you're about right there," said Mr. Yates, dryly. "I've lived in town, man

and boy, this forty-odd year, and Miss Down — Biddles that was — has lived in the same place ever sence her brother bought it and stocked it; and that's fifteen year last fall."

"Ah! indeed! then perhaps you can inform me how she is at present. Are the family well? There are three boys — are there not?"

"Then you never was up here afore?"

"No. It was at Jeremiah Biddles's funeral that I saw Becky and her mother. I was struck with the child's resemblance to her uncle. That alone was enough to interest me in her. Jeremiah Biddles was my dearest friend."

"Then perhaps you know how much he was wuth when he died. The story run here that it was all of a million."

"Such was the fact," replied the judge.

"By Juniper!" exclaimed the farmer, bringing his great horny fist down savagely upon his knee. "Ef that's the case, then them Downses hev been treated shabby. It was the worst kindness in the world to

provide 'em, year in and year out, with money in plenty, and then to die and not leave 'em a cent. They were like Babes in the Wood at first. I dunno what would hev become on 'em, ef it hadn't been for Becky. She's the salvation of 'em all, sir." And down came his fist again like a sledge-hammer.

"Then she is working the farm to advantage? I am heartily glad to hear it," returned the judge. "The knowledge of her undertaking such an enterprise filled me with wonder. To see her, to encourage her, to help her, if need be, was the sole object of my coming here."

"See here," said Mr. Yates; "you keep straight along home with me—will yer? I guess I can scare you up as good a dinner as you could get at the tavern; and then, after you've taken a look round, if you kin make up your mind to be contented, you kin stay as long as yer a mind to."

All during this conversation the horses of the farmer had been walking abreast of the

horses in Gideon's wagon. Now, the grays, at a word, shot ahead, and Judge Peters could only bow his acquiescence.

Danie clapped her hands. "Let us stay at Cherry Farm all summer," cried she. "Don't go to the mountains at all."

CHAPTER XV.

FARMER YATES'S BOARDERS.

THE farmer put his horse to a trot, and the wagon followed briskly. They whirled through the village, past the swinging tavern sign, where they had intended to stop; and so out into an open country road again, with farm-houses scattered along, at intervals, on either side.

Out in the fields, all glorious with their summer's greenness, men were at work. All the way along the low stone walls were completely covered with thickets of wild grape vines and blackberry tangles.

Presently they came to a house standing back a good distance from the road, shaded by two enormous elms.

"That's where the Downs live," remarked the driver to Judge Peters, pointing to-

wards the house with the handle of his whip.

"A pretty situation," said the judge.

"But dreadfully in need of paint," exclaimed his wife.

"Do look at those boys," cried Danie, laughing, and directing their attention down the road.

Coming towards them were four boys. Three were barefoot; the fourth had his pants tucked into his boots. Each carried a hoe. The three barefooted ones were practising soldiery. They shouldered their hoes like guns. They stopped to mark time, beating up the dust with their feet till they were enveloped in a cloud. Then they ran forward, all abreast, in a quick-step. Then they fell down flat on the ground, as if lying in ambush. They raised themselves cautiously, danced backwards in a double-shuffle, and with a shrill cry of, "Charge Bayonets!" "Liberty or Death!" "Union Forever!" they made a headlong rush forward again, and ended by throwing down

their hoes and turning two somersets without stopping.

"Here, you wild Injuns," shouted Farmer Yates. "Git out of the road, or I'll drive right over ye."

The three looked up hastily. They had been so absorbed in their antics that they had not noticed anybody's approach. The one behind, who was walking along steadily, nodded to Farmer Yates, who pulled up his horses just beside her.

"It's time them peas of yourn were got to market," said he. "They bring stiff prices now."

"I'll have some ready for you in the morning," returned the boy.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed he, approvingly. "How's them kidney-beans gittin' along?"

"Very well," was the answer. "I went down to the turf bog last night, and there's any quantity of cranberries there."

As he spoke, the boy removed his straw hat, and commenced fanning his flushed face with it.

At this movement Danie and her father exclaimed at the same instant, "Why, it's Becky Down!"

The judge motioned Gideon to drive up alongside Farmer Yates's team, and bending forward to the astonished girl, who recognized him at once, said, "How do you do, Becky? I have driven twenty miles this morning to make you a visit. Are you not glad to see me?"

Becky looked at him, then at Danie and her mother, and then down at her clothes. It was plain that she was embarrassed at being seen by them in such guise.

"Never mind," said Farmer Yates; "you're only dressed 'cording to your work."

"That's it, exactly," exclaimed the judge. "You musn't stand on any ceremony with us. Besides, your working clothes are an honor to you. We all know what they mean. We all know about your working the farm."

Becky glanced at Mr. Yates.

"I didn't tell 'em," he asserted, with a smile. "They had got wind of it afore."

"We read the letter you wrote to your cousin Gerty," put in Danie. "She let us."

"And I, for one, shall be proud to shake hands with you, Farmer Becky," said her father.

So Becky, encouraged, stepped forward rather shyly, and shook hands, first with the judge, then with Danie, and lastly with Danie's mother.

"We are going to board at Cherry Farm," said Danie, "and I shall be over every day to see you. You must put me to work. I shall have a boy's suit just like yours."

They all laughed at this, even the boys, who had edged up close to Becky, and were taking in the scene open-mouthed. Jacob, especially, laughed so loud that Danie regarded him in particular. Whereupon Jacob disappeared behind Solomon, with a sheepish face. He was not used to having elegant young ladies, with bright black eyes, look at him.

"It's gittin' on to dinner-time," remarked Mr. Yates. "Supposin' we drive ahead

now, and along in the arternoon we'll all come over and inspect Becky's farm."

"Very well," said the judge. "Remember me to your mother, Becky. We'll see you again soon;" and the party were on the move.

As the carriages disappeared from sight, Jacob heaved a deep sigh. "That's the girl for me!" he exclaimed. "Them eyes of hers are just like two black glass beads. I feel as though they had riddled two holes right through me."

Mrs. Down was quite overcome when the children brought her the news. "I *am* ready to drop," said she. "I never! The Peters! Come to board up to Cherry Farm! them grand folks! And to think of their coming *here* this afternoon. There's every stitch of furniture in the best room sold at auction, too. Where *shall* I put 'em?"

"Now, mother," interrupted Becky, "there's no use in being in such a flutter. They won't expect to find things here as they are in the city, and the sitting-room

looks plenty good enough. It is cool and pleasant, and after dinner I'll fill up the chimney-place with fresh asparagus branches."

"And let's have some pitchers of sun-flowers on the mantel-piece," put in Jacob, who seemed much interested.

The other boys clamored loudly for dinner. Their mother lifted the iron pot off the stove.

"I believe to my soul it's burnt," she exclaimed. "I forgot all about it."

Such was the case; but though the boys grumbled a little, they ate heartily, for it was burnt stew or nothing, and the last was out of the question.

All during dinner-time the talk was upon the great topic of the day — the arrival of the Peterses in town, and the all-important visit of the afternoon.

"I shall put on my bombazet," said Mrs. Down, who could not get over her flurry, "and my mohair cap, and the boys must have on their shoes and stockings, and their best jackets."

The boys favored this motion. By it they would get a half holiday. Solomon and David objected a little to the shoe and stocking arrangement. "They're so hot," they urged, "and they cramp up your feet so."

Jacob, however, expressed himself as "willin' to go the whole figger."

"Well," said Becky, "I can't spare a half day, even for the Peterses. I shall go to work just the same, until they come, and then I'll show 'em over the farm."

"What, in that rig!" asked her mother.

"Why not? They've seen me in it once. I did feel kind of ashamed in the first of it, but I've got all over that. Besides, I can't work in any other."

So Becky went out amongst the onions, and left the boys and her mother to adorn themselves.

Jacob pumice-stoned his face and hands, and wet his hair sopping under the pump. He also decorated the button-hole of his jacket with a nosegay of old maid's pinks,

which grew luxuriantly just back of the house.

In the mean time the Peterses had been made acquainted with Cherry Farm and Mr. Yates's wife.

The latter had been found by the farmer in the milk-room, skimming the cream off the tops of the pans.

"Land's sake!" she had exclaimed, when he first broached the subject of boarders. "I never knew you to do such a crazy thing in all your life before. Their trunks are in the entry — are they? They can stay there, then, until you carry them down to the tavern. Whatever should I do with three boarders, three strangers, three fine, stuck-up city folks here?"

"Well, well," returned the farmer, smiling good-naturedly at these rather impatient remarks, "if you're so set against it, I'll back out of the bargain. The price these city folks are willin' to pay will make up ten times over for the trouble; and then I've taken a kind of notion to 'em. But never

mind. I'll tell 'em how 'tis, and I guess I'll harness right up again, and take 'em to the village."

"You shan't do any such thing," said his wife, who was the most hospitable creature in all the world. "Do you suppose I'd let them go off till after dinner, and everything all ready to set on the table? Where are they, did you say? In the south room? I'll just run in to them a minute. I don't suppose you even asked them to take off their bonnets;" and away bustled the good dame.

Mr. Yates followed on behind, and chuckled inwardly.

Mrs. Peters's pale face — for the long, dusty ride had wearied her even more than she was aware — awaked Mrs. Yates's compassion at once.

"And you've rid twenty miles in all this heat — do tell!" she exclaimed. "You shall have your trunks taken right up stairs this minute. There'll be plenty of time to lie down and rest a little before dinner. I'll see to the fresh water and towels myself."

She left the room to carry out her hospitable intents, and Mrs. Peters settled herself back against the sofa-cushions with a sigh of contentment.

"I am so glad we are to stay here!" said she. "I hardly expected to be so fortunate."

"I knew how it would be," answered the farmer, "as soon as she set eyes on that little darter of yourn. Our Annie would have been somethin' like her size, if she'd a lived."

His voice grew a bit husky here, and he got up hastily and walked to the window, where Danie stood looking out, with true childish curiosity.

"We couldn't bear to put her in the graveyard," he continued; "so we buried her on the place. You can see where it is from here."

Mrs. Peters and Danie both looked where he pointed. Through the trees, in the midst of a clump of dwarf evergreens, they could see the top of a marble urn, on the rim of

which two white doves with outstretched wings seemed hovering.

"That vase," said he, "was wife's notion; and I keep it filled with grain, so that any time in the day you're a mind to go there, you'll find dozens of birds flyin' and singin' all about. It makes it pleasant, like, and cheerful."

Just then Mrs. Yates came back, and announced the guest-chamber in readiness; and the travellers mounted the wide, old-fashioned staircase, and took possession of the spacious, straw-matted, muslin-curtained room into which their hostess ushered them, with many exclamations of delight and congratulation.

CHAPTER XVI.

JACOB.

A FEW weeks passed, and then a few more, and still Farmer Yates's boarders had no thought of leaving Cherry Farm. The gunning and fishing enchanted the judge; the rural beauty, the delicious calm and simplicity all about her, delighted Mrs. Peters; and as for Danie, all the hours were diamond-strung, and flew away on wings tipped with gold.

All Mrs. Yates's heart went out towards this little stranger, who was, as the farmer had said, "somethin' like the size" that her Annie would have been.

The resemblance stopped here, to be sure; for Danie's eyes were black as night, while Annie's had been blue as lakelets. But her laughter, her merry ways, the echo of her

flying footsteps upon the stairs, awoke a flood of memory. And sometimes Mrs. Yates so forgot herself, that, at the sudden appearance of Danie, who often danced in upon her unawares, she would start, as if the last five years had been a dream, and she had expected to see her own Annie walking in at the door. There was nothing she could refuse her. The whole house was open to her.

She was as much at home in the great farm-kitchen, watching the mysteries of baking in the brick oven, or the boiling of dumplings in the mammoth kettle, that swung from the iron crane in the big-mouthed fireplace, or in the milk-room, down cellar eating curds and whey, as she was in the parlor, or in her mother's suit of apartments up stairs.

Out of doors, too, she was humored the same. The largest and ripest cherries were picked for her. She had full license among the strawberry beds. She was smilingly welcomed out in the cow-yard and the

piggeries, and was taught how to pull the latch of the granary, where a cat and nine kittens afforded her much amusement. The farmer bought her a little rake down in the village, with which she raked hay; he made her a swing under the big butternut tree, and slung her a hammock in amongst the grape vines; and every morning, before the dew was off the grass, the two went hand in hand to the little clump of dwarf evergreens.

And while Danie hung her garland of flowers over the little scroll, that said "Annie, aged seven years," the farmer poured his measure of grain into the marble urn, forever guarded by the two white doves. And besides Danie's garland, there were living flowers growing thickly all over the little grave, and the bees were gathering honey, and the air was filled with fragrance, and the birds were sure to be fluttering overhead, trilling their songs of thanks. It was a pleasant spot, and Danie loved to come here.

One might suppose, so varied and numer-

ous were her pleasures and occupations at the farm, that she would have had no time to spare outside. Such was not the case, however. She made the acquaintance of half the folks in town, and was a frequent visitor at the Downs.

Becky was a wonder to her. She would go out in the field where she was at work, and, perched upon the top of the stone wall, would watch her, as she bent steadily to her task.

"Farmer Yates says you're the smartest girl he ever knew," remarked she, one day, sitting on her perch, and admiring Becky's diligence and dexterity in pulling weeds.

Becky smiled. "Perhaps everybody don't think like Farmer Yates," said she.

"I do!" exclaimed Danie; "and so does mamma and papa."

The judge, on the occasion of his first visit to Becky's farm, had indeed been amazed at sight of the well-kept thrifty fields, and could hardly credit it all to the skill and labor of a girl just entering her

teens. He had gauged the capacities of the rest of the family by the stories of their separate failures, which Mr. Yates had given him in full. He also judged pretty accurately of the shirking propensities of the three boys by his first glimpse of them at home, lounging about in their best jackets, doing nothing.

"Becky is a diamond in the rough. She only needs a little polishing."

So he had expressed himself to his wife, and with his words a plan had flitted through his head. For the time being, however, he kept this plan a secret.

It was on the occasion of the Peterses' first visit that Jacob made himself conspicuous by his gallantry to Danie.

He ruthlessly despoiled himself of his breast-knot, and presented it to her, with the gracious remark, "You may have 'em. I can get a lots more."

Danie thanked him, and put the raggedy bouquet to her nose; whereupon she made an awful face.

"Don't you like flowers that smell?" asked Jacob, who was observing her.

"Not when they smell like that," she answered, tossing his floral offering to the ground.

The whole party were at this time in the blueberry pasture, walking down the cart-path to the river. There was a melon-patch here, that Farmer Yates declared "was a sight to behold," and some squashes that were going to be mammoth.

Danie's hasty rejection of the "old maid's pinks" put a damper upon Jacob for a few minutes. Then he brightened up again.

"There's a swamp over there," he said, in a half whisper, edging up a little closer, and ducking his head to one side, "and a pond."

"Is there?" returned Danie, unconcernedly.

"And water-lilies," continued Jacob, "as big as a bucket."

"O, I don't believe it." Danie seemed to be rousing up a little.

"Want some?"

Danie nodded, and then added, coolly, "I don't care."

But this was enough for Jacob. He disappeared like a flash. You could hear the brushwood crackling where he dashed through; and then all trace of his whereabouts was lost.

Five, ten minutes passed. Farmer Yates was standing astride of a squash vine, poking the leaves gently with his cane, to get a better sight at the blossoms, when Jacob reappeared, drenched and dripping. But his face was radiant, and his hands full of water-lilies.

Mrs. Peters exclaimed in astonishment; but Jacob addressed himself to Danie.

"You see," said he, panting, — for he had been running, — "there's a raft down at the pond, that me and Sol made; and when I got out in the middle it sunk. But here's the lilies. They'll all blow open in the morning."

This was the beginning of Jacob's devotion to Danie, which continued through the

summer. It gave rise to no end of raillery on the part of his brothers, who here had a good chance to "poke fun." But Jacob was dauntless.

When Danie said she liked mosses, he scoured the woods to procure her rare and beautiful specimens. He captured her a little gray squirrel, and made for it a revolving cage; and very numerous were the errands he made to Cherry Farm, where, if Danie allowed him to swing her till his short arms ached and his best jacket was split out at the shoulders, he was supremely happy.

Danie took all this as a matter of course, was much amused at his droll ways, and was sorry when he put his foot in a hornets' nest down in the meadow, where he went looking for early pears; and brought him some salve on another still sadder occasion, when he had poisoned himself in the most fearful manner with woody nightshade. Seeing the beautiful purple flowers on the edge of the swamp, he had heedlessly gathered them for her. Fortunately for Danie,

she did not poison easily, and so escaped harm; but Jacob was laid up for weeks.

But at times she wounded poor Jacob sorely. When, with great labor and pains, he cut out a red flannel heart, and sewed a black worsted skewer on it, so that the point of the skewer appeared to be buried in the flannel heart; when he stuck this arrangement firmly upon the back of a sheet of paper with furniture glue, warranted to mend broken chair-legs, and make them stronger than new; when he had further embellished this graceful token with this original couplet (it must be borne in mind that it was the hottest of dog-day weather when he composed it), —

> "For sody-warter and ict lemunaid I do knot pine,
> So you will bee my valluntine;"

and when, finally, he presented this grand combination, carefully enfolded in verjuice-colored tissue paper, Danie laughed so heartily that our hero retired in confusion.

But "the unkindest cut of all" was at

Farmer Yates's apple-paring, which was held in the big barn. All the neighborhood was invited, — old, young, and middling, — for the Yateses never did anything by halves. The barn floor was swept and scrubbed till it was almost as smooth as that of a dancing-hall; the hay, that filled the lofts on either side, was raked and trimmed till not a wisp was out of place; and lanterns were hung thickly from the rafters, and flashed a line of light adown the long row of tables that stretched through the centre from end to end, laded with wooden trays filled with apples, rosy-cheeked, or yellow-skinned, or dainty-streaked, as the case might be.

At the tables was seated a merry, joking, busy throng. The children were all in a bunch together. Jacob was planted at Danie's elbow. He was very clumsy at his work. He cut his apple-parings half an inch thick.

At last, after a great many trials, he butchered an apple from "stem to stern," without once breaking the paring. He held

up the long, spiral ribbon by one end, whirled it round and round, and flung it over his head upon the floor behind him.

"It'll make a D, I know," said he, and headed the rush that ran to see.

"It *is* a D!" exclaimed Becky; and so it was — a very good one too.

"D's for Danie," spoke up Jacob, serenely. Danie shrugged her shoulders.

"See what mine will be!" cried she, exhibiting a paring as thin and crisp as a shaving; and she whirled hers over her head, just as Jacob had done. The letter made this time was not so plain.

"I think it's a J," remarked Jacob.

"No, it's a G," said Danie; "but that stands for you just the same."

"How so?" inquired he, his eyes sparkling.

"Because it stands for goose," was the cruel answer; and Danie looked up mirthfully. And there was a general laugh at Jacob's expense.

It was not till the supper, that was given

in the big farm-kitchen when the paring was over, that Jacob fully recovered himself; and not then, until he had stowed away under his jacket a whole pumpkin-pie, a small mountain of pandowdy, and a baker's dozen of nut-balls.

So the time went on. The harvesting was done, the cider made, the stubble in the fields grown dry and sere, and the trees had put on their last flush of autumnal glory. Yet the Peterses still lingered at Cherry Farm, loath to leave.

But, at last, in the late October days, they took their departure Becky and Jacob were at the depot to see them off. And when Danie kissed Becky good by, it was with these words: "Only for a month."

As she walked home, Becky was busy with her thoughts — so very busy that she did not notice the broad band of crape that solemn-faced Jacob had tied around his left arm.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH.

THE judge's little plan had, within the last few days, fully unfolded itself. Mrs. Peters had approved of it, Danie had been delighted, and Becky had been filled with wonder at the idea of spending the winter in town at the judge's, and studying under Danie's own private masters.

The judge had said, if you remember, that Becky only needed polishing; and this was the way he was going to do it. All through the summer he had watched her carefully, and more and more was he impressed with her ability, her tact, her patience and perseverance.

Her success astonished everybody, and, not the least, herself. The three-acre lot did so well that Farmer Yates insisted on

paying her quite a round little sum, which, he said, was only the balance due. The turf-bog yielded bushels and bushels of cranberries, and her other harvests went beyond her expectations. The little pig Mr. Yates had given her had grown into a hog, so fat that he could hardly waddle. It was predicted that he would weigh five hundred pounds, at the very lowest. The number of slices of bacon, and the amount of salt pork, he would make, are almost too much to reckon. Becky also had the honor of raising the largest squash in the whole state, and drawing the first prize at the cattle-show. The profit was even more than the honor here, since the prize was one hundred dollars. It isn't every day that one can get one hundred dollars for one squash.

Becky's example had spurred her mother into something like smartness, and household matters were conducted in a clockwork manner, that a year ago would have seemed incredible. The boys, too, though they still were very fond of "fun," had sobered down,

under the lead of Captain Becky, into very fair field hands and co-farmers.

By her unflagging work, by her will, that rode down every obstacle in its way as surely and steadily as the chariot of the sun rides down the mists and vapors of the morning, had she gained, and more than gained, her ends. Her two child hands, by main strength, had lifted the family above want, and had built about it a bulwark of respectability, which, in its palmiest days, had been lacking. Order out of chaos she had brought, and harmony out of Bedlam. Judge Peters had not rated her too highly when he called her a diamond.

But, as he had said, she was a "diamond in the rough." The crust of ignorance dimmed her brightness, just as the dulness of the uncut stone half hides the dazzle within. And, as the ugliness of the toad makes you forget the jewel in its eye, so Becky's overgrown awkwardness and unrefined ways blinded you, at first sight, to the treasure of her worth.

To take, as it were, one step, to be spirited, as by magic, from a dull, bare country life, into all the politenesses and elegances of the "first city society," is rather bewildering. At least, Becky found it so.

She arrived at the Peterses' one Saturday night. Sunday, then, was her first day in the city. She accompanied Danie and her parents to church. Danie was not dressed either showily or expensively, and Becky's beaver bonnet, and brown cloak and dress, had been selected, and fitted, and trimmed to the very best of Miss Riggs's ability. Still, the wearer of them felt very countrified, as she walked by the side of Danie to church. She had the sense to see that with her clothes on, Danie would have been Danie still; but, notwithstanding, she felt her gawkiness growing upon her with every step; and as it occurred to her how clumsily she was using her feet, and how much her hands were in her way, she colored painfully, and hardly dared to draw her breath. Danie did all she could to set her at ease;

for, in spite of her aristocratic birth and position, and her heiress-ship, she was as true a little democrat as ever trod shoe-leather.

The organ was playing softly when the party reached the church. The Peterses' pew was very near the front. Becky felt every eye was upon her, as she walked down the broad aisle, behind Danie; and, horror of horrors, how her boots squeaked! When she reached the pew, and Danie motioned her to pass in first, she stumbled over a cricket, which fell with a great noise.

There was an audible titter from the pew adjoining, and Becky lifted her shame-covered face to look straight into the eyes of her two cousins — Gerty and Caroline. The Biddleses' and the Peterses' pew were side by side. The surprise was mutual. But Gerty leaned forward and smiled, while Caroline, who had been the one to titter, turned her head away scornfully. Their mother was not with them. A lady dressed in black seemed to have them in charge, for she

shook her head at Caroline when she tittered, and touched Gerty gently on the shoulder when she leaned forward.

"How astonished your cousins looked!" said Danie, as they were going home.

"I didn't know they went to your church," said Becky.

"Of course not. How should you? I didn't tell you, on purpose. I saw Gerty looking back as she went out, but I suppose Caroline wouldn't let her stop to speak to you."

Danie guessed about right here. Gerty had wanted to speak to Becky, but Caroline had dragged her away, saying in an angry whisper, "I won't wait a minute for you. If you don't come right along, I shall tell the coachman to drive off without you."

Gerty did not dare to cross her imperious sister; so she followed her meekly, and the two, with the lady in black, got into the carriage, which stood at the church door waiting for them, and were driven away.

The next day the same carriage — a

most elegant affair, of a dark olive-green, with a shield and a coat-of-arms emblazoned upon the door — stopped at the Peterses'.

Mrs. Peters smiled shrewdly when the card, upon which was engraved "Mrs. Jeremiah Biddles," was brought up to her.

She found that lady at her very sweetest, — honey is no comparison, — and *so* astonished at what the children had told her.

"I could hardly believe it," said she; "for pity's sake, do tell me how it happened that Becky Down was at church with you yesterday morning."

"It is very easily explained," returned Mrs. Peters, as if it was the simplest thing in the world. "Becky is one of the family now. She is to spend the winter with us."

"O! ah!" Mrs. Biddles almost choked; but she recovered herself, and said smilingly, "I didn't know you were so well acquainted."

"We were within half a mile of her all summer," was the answer.

"You must have got very much interested in her."

"We did."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Biddles, who was always very gracious to Mrs. Peters, and never more so than now, "I know you are very charitable; but this strikes me as so Quixotic. I would offer to relieve you, part of the time; but poor relations are *such* a bore."

"I do not think I shall find Becky a burden."

"I hope not, I'm sure; but you do not know the family as well as I do. Mr. Biddles let them impose upon him; but after his death I washed my hands of them. I presume they have complained to you of my treatment before now. Such folks know how to tell pitiful stories."

For the life of her, Mrs. Jeremiah Biddles could not, towards the last, prevent her voice from betraying her uneasiness and anxiety.

Very quietly Mrs. Peters took up the cudgels in Becky's defence.

"I have heard no complaints," said she. "Becky is capable beyond any girl of her age that I ever saw. Cheerfully, and of her own accord, she has undertaken the support of the whole family; and the results of this one summer have proved that she has not misjudged her powers. Such independence and energy as hers would not stoop to charity, I am sure."

"You excite my curiosity," murmured Mrs. Biddles, whose ease, during Mrs. Peters's speech, had fully returned to her. "I was not aware before that Mr. Biddles's niece was such a very remarkable person. Pray what is the line of business she has found so highly lucrative?"

"Farming," answered Mrs. Peters, concisely.

Mrs. Biddles laughed. "How ludicrous!" she simpered. "I can fancy her in a cowherd's frock, shovelling dirt, and brawling to the cattle. How delicate her voice must be! She had the stride of a ploughman, no doubt, and wore brogans."

"She wore cowhides, and a full suit of boy's clothes." And Mrs. Peters smiled.

"Worse and worse!" The lady raised her hands in affected horror. "Why, the little clodhopper can be scarcely presentable. But there, I don't wish to be sarcastic; and I am her aunt-in-law besides. I don't object to her making her cousins a call, now and then. She can't hurt them much so. But to think of Danie's associating with her all winter! I'm sure I hope you won't repent of your bargain. I must be going, though. I had no idea it was so late."

She looked at her watch, and arose. Mrs. Peters bowed her out very politely; but when she was alone, she stood for a few minutes by the window, drumming against the pane with her fingers nervously, whilst a look, half of mirth, half of vexation, was mingled in her face.

"And this is all the sympathy the wife of such a true-toned man as Jeremiah Biddles feels for his only sister's child!" she murmured. "Just as much as if he had left a

will, has she defrauded this widow and her fatherless ones. And now she pretends to draw the skirts of her ultra refinement around her, for fear she will be contaminated. If it were not so childish, I would —"

"What would you do, mamma?" And Danie clasped her mother about the waist, and thrust her face roguishly in sight. Passing by the open door, she had heard her voice, and stealing up behind her noiselessly, had surprised her in these last words.

"Something *you* would like, no doubt," was the answer, the mirthful expression predominating.

"Tell me," urged Danie, tyrannically. "And hasn't Mrs. Biddles been here? I thought I saw her carriage driving down the street."

Danie, being the only child, and having a wise little head of her own, was often made her mother's confidant. Without more ado Mrs. Peters rehearsed the conversation that Mrs. Biddles had held with her that morning.

Danie could not see anything laughable in it. She was very indignant over it, until her mother finished the sentence she had been surprised in as she stood drumming on the window. Then, indeed, Danie's merriment was intense.

"O, mother, do," laughed she; "that is, if Becky is willing. I know she will not fail us at the end."

"Well, we will see what your father says. If *he* don't object."

Just then Danie's French master was announced, and she walked off to her lesson, with a mysterious sparkle in her black eyes, that gave token of some delightful project revolving within.

CHAPTER XVIII.

POLISHING.

IT was an afternoon of the same week in which Mrs. Biddles had made her visit of inquiry and investigation at the Peterses'.

"Girls," said she, looking in the school-room, where Caroline and Gerty sat with their governess, the same lady that had attended them to church, the Sunday before, dressed in black, "Danie has called, with your cousin. You may come down to the reception-room with me."

The purple-velvet reception-room was as exquisite as ever. The sun shone brightly through the lace curtains, and mellowed the gold-framed pictures on the wall, and flashed through the pendants of the chandelier, and touched up the great yellow lilies, rare exotics, that, in vases of finest

workmanship, were placed about the room, shining out gorgeously from their purple background. The effect was magnificent. Everything was gold and purple.

In a very conspicuous position, just where the light fell upon her the strongest, sat Becky. Danie had taken a more retired place. A little cobweb of a veil, too, partially shaded her face.

Becky seemed to look more awkward and uncouth than ever. One knee was crossed upon the other, which showed her large feet encased in stout, clumsy boots, and coarse-ribbed blue yarn stockings, to great advantage; her hands, from which she had removed her gloves, were spread out in her lap, fearfully rough, and tanned, and dingy; and her brown beaver bonnet was pushed back from her face, which loomed out, with its high cheek-bones, reddened by their summer's exposure to all winds and weathers. Sunburn and freckles did not add to her appearance.

"How do you do, Becky?" said Mrs.

Biddles, superbly, taking a seat opposite to her.

"Very well, marm," was the answer, in a loud, rough voice, that made her aunt start.

Caroline hardly nodded to her cousin, but Gerty went up and gave Becky her hand shyly. For a second, as she returned the pressure of Gerty's soft fingers, the rude stare vanished from her face. But she bounced down into her chair, after it, with such violence that the springs in the cushion snapped.

Mrs. Biddles's forehead contracted.

"Seems to me you are very noisy," said she, impatiently.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Becky, shortly, opening her mouth so wide that she showed all her front teeth, both upper and lower. "I've had sech full swing out of doors long back, that I've got tougher'n a pine knot. But I reckon it'll wear off by the time I go hum."

"Mrs. Peters says you have done very well with the farm this summer. You look suited to just such rough work."

"Did you lay stone walls and dig ditches?" inquired Caroline, scornfully.

"Not 'xactly," said Becky, swinging her foot vigorously backwards and forwards; "but I cradled oats, and hoed cabbages, and corn, and onions, and dug taters, and raised a pig that weighed five hundred and sixteen and a quarter pounds."

"And now, I suppose, you have come to the city," tittered Caroline, "to learn Italian, and French, and music."

"Ya-as, I s'pose so," said Becky, not seeming to know that she was being made fun of.

"O, and painting," went on Caroline; "of course you will take lessons in painting too."

"Wal, I'd like that. I want to paint our house next spring, an' it would be a good thing to learn how."

"And the pig that weighed five hundred and sixteen and a quarter pounds," said Caroline, tittering again, "you could paint that from memory."

"Haw, haw! so I could," roared Becky,

slapping her hand down upon her knee with vigorous force. "Haw, haw! I must learn paintin' — that's a sure go."

Mrs. Biddles's forehead had contracted more and more at every fresh expression and every ridiculous motion of Becky, and at her startling "haw, haw," she rose to her feet, as though her last thread of patience was worn bare.

"It is time for the girls to walk out with their governess," said she, abruptly.

Danie replied promptly, "It is time we were going, too," and began to take leave at once.

"Caroline and Gerty would be happy to see *you* any time," remarked Mrs. Biddles to Danie, pointedly.

She hardly noticed Becky's awkward "Good day, aunt Biddles."

As for Caroline, she tossed her head, as Becky ducked towards her. Only Gerty said, "Good by, cousin Becky," and looked after her in puzzled amaze as she walked away.

Caroline ran to the window, when she heard the vestibule door close. Her cousin appeared even more outlandish in the street than in the house. She was swinging her long, lank arms, and taking enormous, mannish strides, that compelled Danie to almost run to keep up with her.

"Just look at her!" exclaimed Caroline to her sister and mother. "What a vulgar, countrified thing she is! She is ten times worse than when she was on before. I should think Danie would be mortified to death to be seen out with her."

"*You* never shall be seen with her, at any rate," said her mother, who was looking over her shoulder; and at that moment the two they were watching turned the corner.

The Biddleses' gaze could not reach them then, and they both stopped, and burst into a hearty peal of laughter. Becky took off her bonnet, and put it on in a more proper fashion.

"How comical it all was! I could hardly keep my face sober," cried Danie, when she *could speak* for laughing.

"But Gerty looked so sorrowful and astonished. She almost put me out two or three times."

Then the two laughed again, and moved on. Becky's arms rested quietly by her side, and she no longer had the "stride of a ploughman."

It would seem by her altered manner, and the few words interchanged with Danie, that she had been playing a part on this her first appearance at her aunt's.

And such was, indeed, the case. The heartless, sneering manner that her aunt had adopted, when speaking of her to Mrs. Peters, had roused that timid little woman. And the plan that had half-mischievously entered her head, and which she was about to express when Danie had interrupted and surprised her, had been something to this effect.

She, as well as her husband, had full faith in Becky's powers.

One had said, "She," meaning Becky, "is quick-witted. The rough edges will

soon be rubbed and rounded off her. In six months she will appear as polished as any girl of her age."

And the other had responded in the same strain. "She is overgrown now, and her work has been too rough and hard for her. She is bony as a skeleton, and her hands and feet seem out of all proportion. But let her have proper exercise, proper food, proper care, and she will be more than fair-looking."

Now, to such enthusiasm as this, Mrs. Biddles's remarks were simply insulting; and after due deliberation, and a frenzy of coaxing from Danie, the judge and his wife had given Becky all needful directions, and while yet her summer's tear and wear were fresh upon her, had sent her to call on her lady aunt and cousins.

The result of this call was a note to Mrs. Peters, saying, "I am willing to contribute to the support of the heathen, if they will stay in their own country; but I will not tolerate Becky Down in my house again. To

my thinking, she would be much better off in her backwoods home. I have no doubt that by this time you think so too. There is no use in our keeping up the farce any longer. Your patronizing her in the first place I have taken as a reflection upon me. I am, however, willing to overlook all that, and will pay the girl's fare home with the greatest pleasure;" and then, with a grand flourish, not of trumpets, but of ink, the note was signed, "Yours truly, Mrs. Jeremiah Biddles."

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Peters, with a tremor of indignation in her voice; "if Becky were really as rough and unpromising as the counterfeit she showed of herself to her aunt, and if I had repented of taking her, that note would decide me not to give her up. As it is, though, it shall spur me on to still greater effort, and Mrs. Biddles's country 'clod-hopper' shall burst upon her at last like the sun flashing out of a cloud."

The judge cried, "Bravo! The die is cast. *Io, triumphe!* Becky shall yet astonish the world."

Now, then, for our heroine, on whom such tremendous odds are cast. But stop. It will not do to tell even the reader of the gradual processes she went through; for is she not to astonish the world?

I will take you at once, then, to the finale. Imagine a day in April as warm and balmy as the softest in June. Imagine a great hall, with mullioned windows and frescoed walls. The hall is filled to overflowing with all the fashion and *élite* of the city; for to-day the great *maestro* and musician, Reichart de Paul, holds his annual exhibition with his pupils. There is a great flutter and expectation, for Reichart de Paul's exhibitions are something that money cannot buy. They are above price, and all these ladies and gentlemen have been collected by express invitation. His pupils are picked. Only those who have more than ordinary voices can win a place on his list. Though he were bribed with the wealth of the Indies, this stiff old autocrat of a Reichart de Paul would not swerve one hair's breadth from

his rule. So much for the standard of his pupils. And here they come. They file out from an inner room, and pass up the carpeted steps to their seats upon the platform. Their master comes last, with a roll of music in his hand. He is to play all the accompaniments. He would trust to nobody but himself.

What would surprise you most, — that is, if you were a stranger, and had never been to one of these famous exhibitions before, — would be the appearance of the pupils. Not their faces, — those were invariably high-toned and patrician, for these were all scions of the "first families," — but the utter absence of ornament, furbelow, or frippery about their dress. Every pupil was dressed in white, but their eccentric master decreed that it should be "plain muslin, with a straight skirt, with no cross-way cuttings, no hanging pieces, no ends, nor embroiderings, no anything, not even a ribbon, or a flower of any kind in the hair."

"It is music I want," this man said, —

whose whole soul was wrapped in that one word, — "music. I will have nothing else."

Not one of his pupils would have dared but to comply. Some affirmed — though this is mere hearsay — that the musician gave out the number of yards round the skirts of the dresses must be.

But hush! while all this gossip has been poured into your ear, Reichart de Paul has taken his seat at the piano. He is a little man, with gray hair straggling over his shoulders.

He plays a prelude; and even the flutter of fans is suspended, and then the voices of his pupils break forth in chorus. After this come solos, duets, grand solemn chants, that seem to lift the hearers up to heaven; and airy fantasias, full of shakes and trills, delicious enough to set a cast-iron statue all a-quiver.

Of all the pupils, no one gains more applause than a slender, dark-haired girl, with a haughty red mouth and a step proud as a queen's. Her voice is not so powerful, but

it is delicately fine. It is like a gold thread — long drawn out. This is Caroline Biddles. Her mother and Gerty are in the audience; and Mrs. Biddles's marabou feathers — she has got into "dressy mourning" now — go flying over her smiling face as she returns the nods and congratulatory looks of her dear "five hundred" friends gathered about her.

No one, however, not even Mrs. Biddles herself, expects Caroline to win the gold medal, the prize Reichart de Paul gives to his best singer. Mrs. Biddles has said publicly "It is entirely out of the question, for Caroline has taken lessons but a twelve-month, while some of his pupils have been with him years."

The medal is finally, to every one's satisfaction, bestowed upon one of the larger and older pupils, who receives it with a blush of pride, amidst a great patting of kid gloves. The De Paul medal is as grand a decoration as the cross of the Legion of Honor.

"And now, ladees and gentleman," spoke

out Reichart, with his broad German accent, dismissing the successful pupil to her seat, with an abrupt wave of his hand, "I have one more song for you to hear."

There was a look of surprise on every one's face at this announcement. Another song after the bestowal of the gold medal? Such a thing was never known before.

The wonder grew as the little musician dashed down the platform steps, and disappeared through the ante-room door. In a moment he reappeared with a companion. He was leading her by the hand, and there was a grim smile upon his face as he conducted her to the piano. The girl was dressed in plain white, similar to all the other pupils. She was so large-framed and massive-looking that she seemed older than she really was. Her forehead was broad, and white as marble. Her brown hair was brushed away from it, a thick mass of waves. And her head was set upon her shoulders nobly. Her throat was like a marble column — as smooth, as firm, as *round.*

Her appearance was striking. "Who is she?" questioned everybody, with a look.

Somebody said, "How much she looks like Jeremiah Biddles!" and the whisper ran from mouth to mouth, and folks began to look round at Mrs. Jeremiah; and suddenly, without prelude, without even an accompaniment, the girl commenced to sing.

The attention had been breathless before, but now it was even more intense. The voice of this last singer was so different from any of the others! It was so fresh, so full, more untutored evidently, but as natural as that of a woodland bird. You could listen to her with the most delightful feeling of ease. You were sure her breath would never fail her. She would trill and trill, and then, without any break, mount upward to the highest note, or sink as easily to the lowest. Her grand physical development made this possible.

And when she was through, the gentlemen sprang to their feet and shouted, "Encore," and the ladies shook their pocket

handkerchiefs, till the noise and the foam of lace put you in mind of a roaring, snow-capped breaker rolling in to shore.

The girl stepped back dizzily; but the master's grim smile broadened, and with a gesture he stayed the tumult, and she sang again.

Some one threw a laurel-crown at her feet, and Reichart de Paul picked it up and crowned her.

There was a murmur that grew louder and louder. "The prize — the gold medal — give it to her."

"My friends," said Reichart, "listen one moment. This pupil I have had but six months, Nature has given her a great voice. If I could have her one year more, I would make it magnificent. I was not going to have her take part to-day. I wished to wait till next year; then she would have been superb — perfect. But I learn, very suddenly, that I must lose her; so at the last I send for her to sing. The gold medal could hardly, by right, be given to

her; for, though she has more power, she has not the skill of Mademoiselle Furreau."

The audience heard and were satisfied, and Gerty Biddles felt some one touch her shoulder. She turned round and saw Danie, who sat behind her with her father and mother.

There was a triumphant flash in Danie's eyes as she whispered, "What do you think of Becky now?"

"I can't see at all," said Gerty, whose blue eyes were indeed staring blankly. "I am so glad; but — but — how came she to change so?"

"I don't think even your mother could call her a clod-hopper now," exulted Danie, looking proudly at Becky standing amongst the white-robed scholars, crowned with her glossy leaves — noblest of them all.

Then every one rose to go, and the judge, as he gave his arm to his wife, said, "Well, Mrs. Peters, you have made your word good. Becky *has* burst forth like the sun, and astonished the world."

CHAPTER XIX.

RICHES HAVE WINGS.

BECKY was back again on the farm, working as energetically as ever. But where last year she had cultivated one acre, she now cultivated five times as many. She had oxen and horses of her own, and drove her market wagon in person. She was a shrewd business woman, every one admitted; and Farmer Yates, more than ever, looked upon her as a miracle. Her manners and appearance, too, overawed the primitive settlers of the town, for Becky did not lose her polish.

She no longer worked out in the fields dressed in boy's clothes, nor pulled weeds to the detriment of her hands. She wore a broad-brimmed hat, and she was properly careful of her complexion. It was

head-work with her this season. She had twelve strong men to do the actual labor, and she planned and directed them. The boys were detailed to the lighter work, the picking and sorting of fruit and vegetables, the care of the cattle, the cleaning of the harnesses and wagons. The citified ways that Becky brought home with her acted upon them like magic, and they obeyed her as humbly as though they had signed themselves, "Yours, most obediently, David, Jacob, and Solomon."

The neighbors spoke of the Downs as a "risin' family," and more than ever delighted in referring to Becky as "Upside Down." She was not called this to her face, however. She was altogether too elegant a young lady for that now. But it was "Miss Becky" the whole town over, and the girl smiled, and was proud that it was so.

I must explain the mystery of the oxen and horses, lest it should be imagined that Becky's magic power had penetrated even to the western prairies, and led the wild

cattle, of their own accord, to wander away from their herds, and come knocking at her door, begging for the yoke and harness.

It was in no such romantic way that these blessings presented themselves. They had been bought, after the regular fashion, at the cattle market, for hard cash, and driven home by a large boy, who, as he delivered them over to their happy owners, declared, "I've had a hard pull of it, and got stuck in the mud a dozen times, up to my chin."

His bedaubed appearance justified his story. The condition of the cattle corresponded, and Jacob, in despair, advised the use of sal soda.

You have been told one fact by going round Robin Hood's barn; viz., that the cattle were bought with hard cash. And whose hard cash should it be but Judge Peters's? It was a loan out of his money coffers that had enabled Becky to conduct her affairs on such an extensive scale. The loan might have been a gift, only Becky would not have it so. Indeed, she was so

sanguine and hopeful of success, that she commissioned the judge to wait upon her aunt, and inform her she wished to pay rent for the farm, and would like her to set her price. This was like to the Independence of '76.

So, in accordance with her request, Judge Peters paid a visit to the Biddles mansion. The two families were not on good terms now, Mrs. Jeremiah having seen fit to take offence at Mrs. Peters's refusal of her generous offer to pay Becky's fare home; and the judge thought it safer not to send up his name.

"Tell Mrs. Biddles," said he to the waiting servant, "that a gentleman would like to see her on business."

The plush-jacketed "Jeames" disappeared, and straightway returned with a message to the effect that "Mrs. Biddles is in the library, sir. Will you please to step there directly?"

Being ushered into the library, the judge found Mrs. Biddles seated at the table, with

a heap of papers, bills, and other documents before her.

A gentleman — a stranger — was standing beside her. He seemed to be on the point of going. The judge heard him say, "You may be assured, madam, that it is the very safest investment for your money. In ten years you will double and treble your principal."

Then Mrs. Biddles turned her head, and gave a start at sight of the judge.

"I — I expected a gentleman on business," she explained. "It was a mistake asking you in here."

The person she had been talking to made his adieus hastily, and departed.

"I will not detain you but a minute," answered the judge, when they were alone.

In a few words he told his errand. Mrs. Biddles had the grace to blush through her sallow skin. "I don't want any rent," she remarked, sharply. "Did I ever say I did?"

"Becky wishes to be independent. She was very anxious to come to an agreement

about this. She is willing to pay any reasonable price."

"Very well," said the lady, impatiently; for at that moment the door-bell pealed out loudly. "I will think it over. I will send you word. I am very much engaged to-day."

It was evident that she was in a hurry to have him go.

Judge Peters held his hat in his hand, and was turning towards the door. Suddenly he stopped, and leaning over the table towards Mrs. Biddles, said, in an undertone, "The old-time intimacy is broken between us; but you will not, I know, think me presuming when I say, Beware of having any business relations with the man I saw here when I entered."

"What do you know about the person?" she inquired, coolly, leaning back in her chair and playing with the nib of her pen.

"I know his private character to be unscrupulous to the last degree," was the emphatic answer.

"And his private character is what I care nothing about. Indeed, judged by the high standard of the Peters's morality, most any one would suffer." The insolent tone touched the judge. "I have warned you," said he; and with a bow he passed out.

Perhaps the knowledge of how much was already involved had made Mrs. Biddles more irritable. As guardian of her two children, she had control of the whole property her husband had left. In an evil hour she had plunged into speculation — how deeply, no one knew but herself. And now her nights were sleepless, and her face often grew strangely haggard, thinking of what she had at risk; and at last she shuddered, as she owned to herself that if her ventures failed she should be beggared.

This was when the judge's warning came. She tried to shake off the feeling of unrest it gave her. But day by day her face grew paler and more haggard, and her moods more irritable. Her acquaintances began to whisper about her altered appearance. Gos-

sip grew busy with her name, and the little business which Judge Peters had mentioned to her never once entered her mind again. What were a few hundreds, more or less, to her, who had hundreds of thousands at stake!

So far away, in her quiet country home, Becky waited in vain for an answer. The busy times were on her. Early and late she labored to keep all the wheels of her machinery oiled and in working order. "Up with the lark" was still her motto; and the morning concerts she and the birds held were marvellous. Indeed, this was the only time in the day that Reichart de Paul's laurel-crowned pupil could take for practising her music; and then her hands were busy with something else. At night she sank upon her hard mattress with a sigh of exhaustion, with never a moment to spare upon the books piled up on the little pine table; and her eyes closed almost instantaneously, and her sleep was peaceful, and sweet, and sound.

She knew nothing of troubled minds, and wakeful, weary night-watches. She knew nothing of what was passing in her aunt's stately mansion.

So the time wore on; and fate and Mrs. Biddles clashed desperately together. And the dark days grew darker, and the crash came.

It was in midsummer. In the sultry heat, in her splendid drawing-rooms, Mrs. Biddles's creditors were gathered — an angry and impatient set.

"How much are we defrauded?" was the question they were frowningly considering.

Mrs. Biddles, now the worst had come, held back nothing. The house, the furniture, the horses and carriages, were booked for sale, and she looked on calmly. But when the farm — Becky's home — was about to be put down, she cried out, suddenly, —

"Gentlemen, have mercy!" and threw a bit of crumpled paper upon the table before them, and hid her face in her hands.

Upon the paper was scrawled some half-

legible characters. Very slowly the creditors deciphered their meaning. This was the sentence they finally made of it: —

"Give the farm and twenty thousand dollars to Nancy."

This was all. No date, no address at the beginning, no name signed at the end. It seemed as if some half-paralyzed, stiffening hand had, by a last, mighty effort, just managed to trace out the ragged, disjointed words.

I do not know as any such thought passed through the creditors' minds; but it was with a look of heightened interest that they turned to Mrs. Biddles for an explanation of the strange document, so strangely thrust upon them.

Mrs. Biddles's calmness had entirely left her. She cowered guiltily as she half raised her eyes to theirs, and she spoke with an effort, in a husky voice, not at all like her own.

"I don't know why I kept that paper," said she. "Some power greater than my

own will has forced me to show it now; and though it would be a blessing at this moment to be struck dumb, I am compelled to speak. You are aware, most of you, how suddenly my husband died. He had an only sister, a widow, with a family of four children. For years he had supported her. He had bought the farm on which she lived, and settled her upon it; and it was his purpose, often expressed, to leave her independent, should he die first. But, cut down like the grass, at a moment's notice, this purpose was thwarted. Still, even in his sudden death-agony, the thought haunted him; and sitting at his desk in the library, he wrote those words with his last breath; for he was leaning forward over the paper, with the pen clinched in his hand, when I found him there, dead."

Such was the guilty woman's confession. It seems strange that she should have made it now, when the power of restitution was passed from her hands. But "murder will out" is an old saying; and at the first she

had told of a power stronger than herself, that bade her speak. It was the still small voice of conscience, that, if kept back and tampered with, will at last burst its fetters and make itself heard. It is more resistless in its way than the spring torrents, when they rise like giants from their icy beds and sweep everything before them.

And the creditors, stern, wronged men, owning neither kith nor kin to the man whose last spark of life had gone out in the blotted line before them, were more charitable — though many of them could ill afford it — than she who had borne his name, and who might, in the days gone by, have spared this gift from her abundance, and not missed it any more than a drop of water is missed out of the ocean, or a grain of sand from the shore.

The money was gone, but the deed of the farm was made over to "Nancy Down and her heirs," forever.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL FOR THE BEST.

"HOW I do pity her!" said Becky; and though there had been a clamor of voices about her for the last five minutes, these were the first words she had spoken.

The occasion was one of great moment, for on the table lay the deed of the farm, with its stamps and seals. A brief letter from the creditors had also been received, as well as a longer and more comprehensive one from Judge Peters.

Becky was thinking of this last, when she said, "How I do pity her!" for in it Judge Peters had told of the utter despair and desolation her aunt had given herself up to. She would see no one, but sat for hours brooding over the ruin that had befallen her, declaring it was a judgment

upon her, and reproaching herself for her wickedness. The house was to be sold over her head in a few days; but, though she was entirely destitute, she gave no thought or preparation to the future. It was in vain that Mrs. Peters, who had forced herself upon her, had tried to rouse her.

"What matters it what becomes of me?" the wretched woman had answered. "It is eternal punishment either way, whether I live or die."

"Think of your children," her friend had urged.

"I do think of them," had been the response. "Night and day I think of them, branded with my sin. Are not the sins of the parents visited upon the children?"

And in this half-frenzied state she still remained.

Mrs. Down and the boys had not been so much interested in this part of the letter as Becky. The idea of the twenty thousand dollars which they should have had, and

which now they never would, touched them in a very tender place.

Mrs. Down declared that "it riled her sky-high."

"So it does me," agreed Jacob, pulling at the neck of his jacket, as if it choked him. "I'd like to see the old cheat that kept us out of it. Wouldn't I talk it right inter her?"

And Solomon and David chimed in, in the same strain.

It was just then that Becky made her exclamation of pity.

"Are you gone crazy, child?" asked her mother, in amaze. "What are you thinking of? I'd like to know how much pity your aunt showed to us."

"Yes," cried Solomon, very much excited; "why didn't she give us the farm in the first place, the way she'd oughter, and the twenty thousand dollars?"

"What business had she to go and spend our money?" exclaimed David, with a red face and a look savage enough to have eaten up his delinquent aunt on the spot.

"Hush!" said Becky, softly, standing up and resting her clasped hands on the back of her chair. "Who knows but it has been all for the best. If we had had the money and the farm in the first place, we should have kept on in the old ways, and never been anything to ourselves or anybody else. Now," and she raised head proudly, "we are of some use in the world. We are respected; we have a good name; we have wronged no one; we are happy; we are independent; we are so rich, that, surely, we can afford to pity *her*."

She went out of the room after she had finished, her honest gray eyes moist and tender.

There was a silence after she had left, broken at last by Mrs. Down, murmuring, "I guess Becky's got the right of it, after all. Louisa *is* to be pitied, and we're the ones to do it."

The boys looked at each other sheepishly, and betook themselves to the barn; and as Jacob backed one of the horses out of his

stall, and set to work to curry him, he exclaimed, as with firm conviction, "I tell you what, fellers, it takes our Beck to do things up brown. Now we're up at the top of the ladder, it's easy enough, as she says, to forgive our enemies, especially when they're tumbled head over heels to the bottom. I'm ready to go in wholesale on the pity."

"I'm good for as much," said Solomon.

"And I," concluded David.

Thus the doughty trio were happily won over. And still Mrs. Biddles sat in her room, wrapped in the sackcloth and ashes of her woe and desolation. Her conscience, gnawing at her heart-strings like a vulture, blackened the sunshine, poisoned the balmy summer air, and made her shudder to think of living on under the ban of everybody's indifference and scorn.

If you had told her that hundreds of miles away, in a little country nook in the northern part of the state, there were those who, in their pity for her, had forgotten all need of bitterness, she would have given you the

lie to your face. She had no faith in any one's charity. How could she have? She didn't know what the word meant.

She heard the door-bell ring one day; but that was nothing. It rang a good many times every day. Folks came on business, from curiosity, for inquiry; some few out of kindness: But it mattered nothing to her. She saw none of them. She had given her orders so fiercely, that it was more than rash to disobey.

But this one day she felt fiercer than ever, and she stuffed her fingers into her ears angrily, after the sharp ting-a-ling-ling had died away, lest she should catch the distant murmur of voices.

So she knew nothing of the quick, steady step that came echoing towards her, up the carpetless stairs, nor of the door-keeper's loud expostulations, nor of the firm tone that said, "She is my aunt; I *will* see her;" and which caused Caroline and Gerty, in the room with their mother, to start and stare at each other in affright.

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So, without any warning, the door opened, and Becky stood before her. Her aunt's brow gathered fury.

"And so you have come to triumph over me," she flashed out like a flame. "Have a care what you say, for I cannot bear much. What is it you want?"

"I want you to come home with me, aunt Louisa. There is room for us all at the farm. We are so sorry for you, and we — pity you." Becky rather hesitated at the last. Perhaps she thought her aunt would not like to be pitied.

Mrs. Biddles's arms had fallen helplessly to her side during Becky's speech. It was so different from what she had expected, that it struck her dumb and motionless.

But Gerty, with a sob of joy, ran and threw herself upon her neck, crying, "O, mother, let us go."

And Caroline came up to Becky, all in a tremble, and took both her hands in her own, and said, "Will you forgive me?"

Mrs. Biddles's face was hidden on Gerty's

shoulder; but when she raised it, it was wet with tears. They were the first she had shed, and they softened and humanized her, and were the harbingers of a true repentance.

The next morning the three left the home, once so beautiful, but now dismantled and uptorn, and went with Becky, humbly and thankfully.

At the depot the Peterses were waiting for them; and this time Mrs. Biddles did not resent the sympathy of her old friends — friends in the truest sense of the word.

As she shook hands with them in a last adieu, she said, earnestly, "I thank God for all that has happened to me." And as the train whirled away, and left them standing upon the platform, the judge turned to his wife and Danie with the words, "Surely, now, we must agree with Becky, that everything has been 'ALL FOR THE BEST.'

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